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THE DEMOCRAT  
AT THE  
SUPPER TABLE



“ I am compelled to ask, Where is the boasted intellect of the British Isles ? ”--*Robert Owen.*

THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE CONFORMITY  
WITH THE AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

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# THE DEMOCRAT AT THE SUPPER TABLE

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## PART ONE

### Chapter One

#### WHAT'S WRONG WITH EVERYTHING

"I SUPPOSE you'll be going out to-night," Mrs. Beveridge said, as she lit a cigarette and supervised the clearing of the supper table. Mrs. Beveridge is a large, blonde woman with faded, fluffy hair and a rather floury complexion. She is a lady. Not only has she seen better days, but she insists on seeing them still. I don't know how far the late Mr. Beveridge (or is he late?) assisted in the decline of her fortunes; but, although she puts the best face possible on her status as the chatelaine of the Georgian Private Hotel, she patently dislikes it. She also dislikes my conversation. So does her son Willie, but that is understandable. At sixteen, he is not strong enough in the mind for a really high-toned discussion. But I noticed with displeasure that the majority of the guests drifted out of the room, with vague excuses, when they saw me sitting firmly back in my chair.

Mr. Baldero is made of sterner stuff. He is a business man, and, I fancy, well-to-do. He is a rather bulky middle-aged man, with a head shaped like a block, and he has very little small talk. I sympathise with him, for I have no small talk either, but quite a rich flood of the other kind. Mr. Levi, who is a very talkative person, of obscure occupations, looked at me rather uneasily, wondering if I had much to say. Only Mr. Chatterjee looked even politely pleased to see me settle down. His opinions are, in my view, quite insane. A moderate number of Chatterjees, strategically placed, would reduce us, in a generation, to the state of howling savages. Nevertheless, he is a nice young man. He listens to me for quite long stretches of time.

But why should he not? Mrs. Beveridge's Private Hotel promises its guests privacy when they want it, and agreeable

company when they feel inclined. Looking round the dull and diminished remnant of the guests, I thought that the bright promise of the prospectus was very far from the truth. Company which turns on the wireless is not agreeable. I frowned at Mr. Levi. Company which does its homework resentfully and noisily at a corner of the table is not agreeable. Company which talks about shares and markets is not agreeable ; and when it settles back to sleep it is almost offensive. Only Mr. Chatterjee lived up to the prospectus.

I picked up a newspaper which was lying on a chair. There was a huge headline across a middle page. "What is Wrong with Britain? A Trenchant Article by Archdeacon Splurge, the Parson with a Punch." The rustling of the pages disturbed Mr. Baldero.

"Is this yours?" I asked, holding the paper up.

"Yes," he said. "You might like to read that article. Interesting point of view that fellow has. Quite a lot in it, I thought myself."

Quite a lot in it. . . . The print was spread as thin as margarine on hotel bread, and the Archdeacon's sprawling and manly signature took up space that would have held the Gettysburg Speech.

"I fancy I know what's in it," I answered, closing my eyes for thought. "What's wrong with Britain is lack of guts. Not lack of the real, essential guts, of course. By no means. The British character is much the same as it always was, thank God. We are Nature's finest gentlemen, but as tenacious as any bulldog. We are easy-going, tolerant and slow to anger, but when we *are* roused—Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, the Eighth Army, Our Women are Splendid.

"But our very virtues are our undoing. Because of our good-nature, we tolerate inefficiency in high places and the rule of a caste system. We have the old school tie in the Foreign Office and the rule of stodgy Union officials in the workshops. In many respects our caste system makes our Democracy a farce, and we have much to learn from Russia. Maybe that sounds almost blasphemous coming from a parson? The good ladies of the Sewing Guild will be shocked, perhaps. Well, I'm going to shock them a bit more. I refuse to be choked by my dog collar, I refuse to be a clerical Blimp, and I say, with a full sense

of responsibility, that in some respects there is more *real* Christianity in Russia than there is here.

"That shocks you? Well, it should. It shocks me, because it's true. What is wrong with us? Laziness, selfishness, lack of imagination. Christianity has become Churchianity, Privilege has come before Principle, and Profit before Patriotism. Look at the Black Market. Nearly everybody is in it. Yes, you! What we need is a strong lead, the word of inspiration, the magic appeal to the idealism of Youth. The spirit of the dark days of Dunkirk—clarion call—Wake Up, England!"

Mr. Baldero was put out, almost affronted. He hadn't known, he said huffily, that I had read the article.

But of course I hadn't read the article. There is never any need to read the articles of a fearless cleric who hits straight out from the collar and speaks as man to man. One of them makes much the same noise as another, just as one dog makes the same noise as another when its tail is caught in a door. It is only human thought which has any range or variety of surprise. There is no thought, there is no consideration of fact, there is no examination of principle in these trenchant critics of our outworn order. That is what is wrong with Britain.

I didn't put this view to Mr. Baldero, because he was really annoyed. He said he never saw much point in arguing about religion, but, all the same, if a parson came straight out and said what he believed instead of mumbling platitudes from the safety of the pulpit (quotation from the article?), he thought the parson deserved something better than to be sneered at and guyed.

I was silent because Mr. Baldero really meant that he himself was being sneered at and guyed. Like many another business man, Mr. Baldero is much reduced when he leaves his office. Running his considerable business with high competence, he feels within himself the force of authority and a decent degree of self-esteem. But, away from his proper activities, he is rather like the Albatross in Baudelaire's poem, which flies and swoops with marvellous grace, but waddles about the deck of a ship in a very ungainly manner. Needless to say, I kept this simile to myself, nor did I attempt to apologise. You cannot assuage the wounds of self-esteem, for self-esteem cannot confess them.

Fortunately, Mr. Levi relieved the tension. Mr. Levi, being a Communist, does not like Archdeacon Splurge, but he likes me

even less. So he said severely that to repeat a man's opinions in a mocking voice was not to disprove them. I agreed at once, and asked Mr. Levi to remember his own principle for his own use on future occasions.

"Even if you make a good guess at what a man has said," Mr. Levi continued, "that proves nothing. Maybe his opinions are obvious because they are true. For example, you won't deny that there *is* inefficiency in high places?"

"No reasonable man could," I replied. "There is inefficiency in high places, just as obviously as there is efficiency in high places, and as there is both inefficiency and efficiency in low places."

Mr. Levi snapped his fingers impatiently.

"Surely," he said, "you won't pretend that inefficiency in low places is as important as in high places."

"Important to whom?" I asked.

Mr. Levi stopped short and looked blank; as well he might, for he is blank. When he says that inefficiency is important, he means that it is important in relation to efficiency. That these words mean nothing whatever when taken by themselves has never crossed his mind. So he muttered something about the importance of efficiency to the general public and the greatest good of the greatest number, or something of the kind.

He was unwilling to accept my suggestion that the inefficiency of persons in low places was more important to *them* than any other inefficiency; for a man's own faults are more important to himself than other people's. Scripture warns us against marking the mote in a neighbour's eye and ignoring the beam in our own. Even if the mote is in our eye and the beam in the neighbour's, the counsel is still sound.

Mr. Levi did not think so. He said if some of the common people were slack and lazy (which he by no means admitted), there were very good reasons for it. They suffered from malnutrition, lack of opportunity, social contempt, miner's nystagmus, bad education, stulted artistic instincts, bad housing, low wages, niggling compensation, unemployment, blind-alley occupations, denial of initiative and responsibility, low-grade entertainment, a dishonest Press, shoddy clothing, a cheese-paring medical service, a very insufficient provision of public baths and libraries, misrule by the men of Munich, a growing sense of futility and

betrayal, and the knowledge that many people in high places were only too willing to do a deal with Fascist forces at any time, and to wreck the Russian Alliance by any means in their power.

It had struck me before that whenever Mr. Levi leaves the point of an argument, which he does very promptly, he talks exactly like Hitler. He is copious, violent and confused. Nothing that he had just said, literally nothing, touched on the matter I had raised.

"To return to the subject," I said firmly. "It is right and charitable to make all plausible excuses for other people (even people in high places); but it is very unhealthy for men to be anxious and angry in making excuses for themselves. I will not return to the state of the struggling poor because it is plain that the subject raises too much feeling. But I would point out to you, Mr. Levi, and to you, Mr. Chatterjee, that you belong to races which have done themselves very serious harm by this trick of self-exculpation. People who put all the blame for their faults on others and on outside circumstances make themselves out to be moral slaves."

Mrs. Beveridge, who had listened with increasing uneasiness, was greatly vexed by the word "slaves."

"Slaves!" she said in indignant apology. "I'm sure none of us think that, Mr. Chatterjee. Why everybody knows that India is just as free as we are. Slaves, indeed!"

She looked angrily at me, and sympathetically at Mr. Chatterjee. Poor Mr. Chatterjee didn't know what to do with this preposterously misconceived assistance, Mr. Levi looked angry, and I very much wanted to laugh. Mrs. Beveridge, puzzled and upset by the uncomfortable silence, looked round and noticed her son Willie drawing little men in his homework book.

"Get you to bed," she said sharply. "Get straight upstairs!"

Willie gathered his books and went to the door with an uncouth, adolescent slouch.

"Slaves, indeed!" he said, with deep irony.



## II

Willie's interruption permitted me, and all of us, to laugh, and the argument might have died, but for the persistence of Mr. Chatterjee. He wanted to make it quite clear that he wasn't anti-British—in fact, he insisted on admitting that India owed much to the finest British minds, such as Walter Bagehot, John Stuart Mill and J. B. S. Haldane. But, at the same time, he said my censure was unfair. What self-exculpation was there, he asked, in the wave of popular Indian indignation over the atrocious affair of Jampanjunga, and how could Indians be held to blame, in the least degree, for that abomination? Was it not necessary, for their own self-respect and moral improvement, that they should make their innocence clear to the whole world?

That was a facer, for I had never heard of Jampanjunga, or its atrocity. Neither had Mr. Levi, and his expression was a study. As fully convinced as Mr. Chatterjee himself that the thing was a vile Imperialist crime, he suffered from the disadvantage of not knowing what the crime was. Being more than ready to admit that the evidence would convince any fair-minded person, he didn't know the evidence. So he sat with a stifled expression on his face, like a man who had a bottle of highly effervescent indignation which he wanted to send spouting and foaming into the air, but which remained imprisoned, for the annoying and merely technical reason that he couldn't find an opener.

I hinted to Mr. Chatterjee that the full details of the Jampanjunga Incident had escaped our notice, and that he would help us much by telling the story. This gave Mr. Chatterjee the chance to show that he could talk every bit as fast as Mr. Levi. It was not easy to follow his narrative, for it was much disturbed by references to Amritsar, Lord Curzon, the malicious fable of the Black Hole of Calcutta, the salt tax, the huge emolument of the Viceroy, and the various sufferings of Mr. Gandhi. Disentangled, the story ran like this.

*The Jampanjunga Incident*

A prominent citizen of Jampanjunga was also prominent in the more enterprising activities of the Congress Party. The Imperialists decided to intimidate this man, so they sent an agent

to invade the peace of the town and assail him with most abominable threats. The agent went so far as to tell the worthy man that steps would be taken if he didn't mend his ways. Afterwards, this hireling pretended that he was referring to the patriot's business activities as a moneylender, but the whole of India knew what to think of *that* story. So did Mr. Levi.

When the tool of oppression had completed his foul work, the victim very naturally raised something of a clamour, and an angry crowd followed the wretch, who was walking provocatively down the principal street. He then added fuel to the fire he had so wantonly kindled by seeking the protection of two policemen. The crowd had confined its demonstration, with most eminent self-control, to the waving of sticks and the throwing of a few stones ; but when the police actually drew their lathis, public indignation knew no bounds.

The agent rapidly acquired a few stone bruises and a knife-wound, which convinced him that intolerable conduct would not be tolerated, and he sought refuge in a house, with one of the policemen. The other ran for police reinforcements, with the obvious intention of creating another Amritsar.

Fortunately, four highly respected citizens detached themselves from the crowd (who were setting fire to the house), and attempted to dissuade the policeman from pursuing his maniacal course. During the argument the policeman died, and, shortly afterwards, more police arrived. These arrested the four citizens and charged the crowd with inconceivable ferocity, coming on them through the smoke of the burning house without a pretence of a warning.

"Damnable," said Mr. Levi. "Simply damnable."

A prominent citizen, Mr. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, had his wrist broken and his toes severely trodden. All India thrilled with horror at the story ; but horror was too mild a term for the feeling which supervened when it was learned that the *agent-provocateur* (the British agent) and the police were not to be prosecuted, but that the four patriots were to be proceeded against for murder.

"Incredible," said Mr. Levi. "Simply incredible."

In course of time, this trial, this judicial farce, this prelude to assassination, took place. A doctor of very high repute in the Congress Party testified that the dead policeman had been in

weak health for a long time, and that rapid movement was certain to be fatal to him. The four accused swore that they had merely defended themselves against unprovoked attack. That would have been enough, and more than enough, for an acquittal in any reputable court, but what clinched the matter was the evidence of the crowd. They swore (a) that the policeman had stabbed himself in baffled rage (twenty witnesses), (b) that he had been stabbed by the British agent while attempting to escape from his side (sixteen witnesses), (c) that he had accidentally cut too deep while trying to fake wounds with the purpose of bringing discredit on the national cause (forty-four witnesses), (d) that he had died of heart failure, and the wounds were inflicted by his fellow policemen after death (twenty-seven witnesses), and (e) that he was not dead at all, but that the body produced was that of a beggar who had been murdered in the police station.

"The evidence was there," said Mr. Chatterjee. "The witnesses were lined up, ready to swear. Think of the weight of that testimony."

"Crushing," said Mr. Levi. "Simply crushing."

But the court refused to be crushed. Indeed, they treated the evidence with such brutal and shameless cynicism that the whole of India fell into a coma. The four were found guilty of murder, and only three were reprieved. Mass demonstrations were held everywhere, and telegrams were sent to Stalin, Chiang Kai Shek, Mr. Wendell Willkie, and the editor of the *Tribune*. Even that well-known temporiser Sir Jarawanda Sing Song Bangh resigned from the Legislature in protest and returned, like Cincinnatus, to the Bar. When the unfortunate victim was actually hanged, horror itself was stunned, and the possibility of a friendly and equal understanding between Britain and India was postponed for anything between three and five thousand years.

"Murder," said Mr. Levi. "Simply murder. Callous, deliberate murder."

Mr. Baldero had listened unwillingly but with growing wonder to Mr. Chatterjee's account of the Incident; and Mr. Levi's comment completed his surprise.

"Murder?" he said in a puzzled voice. "Of course it was murder. The man was tried and sentenced. What was the row about?"

Mr. Chatterjee's expression was painful to see. He looked really ill, and his fine Indian eyes were filled with shock and dismay. He spoke, after some delay, and with great difficulty. Was it possible, he asked, that Mr. Baldero was accusing the four *patriots* of murder? Did he support the infamy of the so-called judicial bench? Did he reject the gesture of Sir Jarawanda Sing Song Bangh? Did he ignore the cloud of witnesses? Did he assert that the telegrams to Stalin, Chiang Kai Shek, the *Tribune* and Mr. Willkie were a waste of money?

Mr. Baldero lost his temper. His face turned red and his voice rose.

"Look here," he said. "I'm a peaceable man, and I've always thought there was a damned sight too much arguing in this house (he looked very hard at me), but I want to ask a question. Who was murdered?"

"The unfortunate citizen of Jampanjunga," Mr. Chatterjee explained, as to a child. "He was hanged in the face of the protests of all the civilised world."

"There was a man killed before that," Mr. Baldero positively roared. "He's dead, isn't he? Right. Who was he? A policeman. Right. Now, tell me what he died of."

"He died of an accidental thrust, in a struggle provoked by himself," said Mr. Levi, with as much confidence as if he had been there.

"Perhaps of a weak heart," Mr. Chatterjee.

"Or miner's nystagmus," I added.

Mr. Baldero picked up his paper and turned his back on the company. He was immediately restored to calm and seemed to be entirely easy in his mind. I think he was relieved to know that it was both impossible and useless to argue. Mr. Chatterjee and Mr. Levi were crazy. That was that. He knew where he was.

But Mr. Chatterjee was puzzled and depressed. He looked at Mr. Baldero's back with an expression of doubt and conjecture. He seemed to perceive dimly that, in spite of Mill, Bagehot and Mr. Haldane, his mind and the Western mind didn't seem to work in quite the same way.

"I am sorry to have upset you, Mr. Baldero," he said very simply and sincerely. "I don't suppose you can guess how deeply this thing affects us Indians, and how we are damped by

a lack of sympathy. I am sure you would not willingly do us wrong, but you seem to be deaf, if I may say so. There is a wall between us. There is a lack of that contact and understanding which we need so much. (Here he spread his hands in a gesture that was inexpressibly pathetic.) There is worse than that. Only to-day I went into a tea room and sat at a table. The waitress asked me to leave, because the customer opposite—objected.”

In spite of himself, his voice broke and his eyes filled with tears. The shame touched him deeply. But the shame was ours, not his.

Mr. Baldero grunted awkwardly, and Mrs. Beveridge tried insincerely to look very sad. Young Willie, who had come slouching back on some excuse or other, stood at the door and looked superior. Young Willie is a Communist, but, in spite of that, he is stuffed with racial superiority. Indeed, his Communism is very formal and shallow ; it is just one of the things he is taught in school.

But Mr. Levi did a very pleasant and natural thing. He, also, is a Communist, and an atheist, and these are not disciplines which do much to encourage human kindness, but now he leaned forward with a quick and warm gesture and laid his hand upon the Indian's hand.

There was something deeper than Bagehot or economic theory in that gesture ; there was the brotherhood of the despised. We looked at the carpet in embarrassment and silence, while the two men of the East touched hands for an instant and felt as one.

## Chapter Two

### WHAT'S WRONG WITH WOMEN

THE evening had passed pleasantly and harmlessly enough for most of Mrs. Beveridge's guests, with reading, listening to the wireless and a little empty conversation. But poor Willie, struggling with his homework at the big table, was

suffering and telling the world about it. At last, he threw down his pen and groaned with a mixture of despair and relief.

"That's my essay done," he said with venom. "And what a subject! Where do they pick them?"

"What was it?" Mrs. Beveridge asked with motherly interest.

"The place of Woman in Society is the gauge of Civilisation. Discuss.' Can you beat it?"

"That seems rather a good topic," Mr. Levi said approvingly.

"That English teacher of yours (Gudgeon, isn't it?) seems rather a progressive chap. I fancy he's a bit out of the rut. In Soviet Russia, no opportunity is barred to women, and they are not held down by shibboleths. For example, there is no such thing as illegitimacy."

This was rather too progressive for Mrs. Beveridge, who told Willie briskly to go and see about the coffee. But Willie didn't stir, and I thought the point was too interesting to be ignored.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Do you mean there are no children born in—ah, um—an irregular manner?"

"Of course not," said Mr. Levi with hearty scorn. "That's one shibboleth the Soviet have knocked on the head. I mean——"

"You mean there's no such thing as legitimacy," I suggested.

Mr. Levi shrugged his shoulders.

"Have it your own way, if you like to quibble," he said.

"I mean that a woman is free to fulfil her biological functions without asking permission of a parson, and the law will see to it that she gets a proper maintenance from the other partner, not to mention time off with pay before and after the event, and all possible medical assistance and advice."

"I hope, Willie, you haven't been writing that kind of stuff," Mrs. Beveridge said hastily. "I don't know that I think so much of Mr. Gudgeon as I used to."

"Oh, he's always blathering about the Soviet," Willie admitted. "But I didn't put any of that muck down. Women equal partners in everything—Cripes!"

"Well, what did you write?" I asked. "Give us your thesis."

To do him justice, Willie was genuinely unwilling to oblige, for he has no high notion of his own literary powers. But his mother thinks he is remarkably good, and she overbore his objections. Willie read his essay in a dead, unpleasant tone of voice, which clearly showed his own opinion of the work. All

the same, it had its points. You might call it thought-provoking, though not in the way that either Willie or Mr. Gudgeon had intended.

*The Place of Women in Society is the Gauge of Civilisation.*  
*Discuss*

"This means if you want to find out what civilisation is like, *cherchez la femme*. If they are hard to find, civilisation is all right. Women are good at swimming and nursing and being mothers. A few of them are good at being other things, but they are exceptions, and they are not good at being women.

"The girls in this school are always talking about being as good as the boys, but when a girl wins a prize it is usually because the boys in her class were caught copying.

"Women say they want an equal chance of being everything men can be, and they boast a lot about what women have done in war factories. But anybody can work in a war factory. Some of our teachers went into factories when the war began. It is surprising how many women doctors there are and how few people go to them. They have to get jobs with the Government. Anybody can get a job with the Government.

"What I want to know is, if women want equal opportunities, what's wrong with a Spitfire? After all, it is called after a woman, isn't it? Why don't they fly it?

"There are two kinds of women, as I said before. I mean, I didn't just say it, but I suggested it. One kind makes you angry and the other kind makes you sort of sick. It makes you angry when women behave like women, losing their kirbigrips and handkerchiefs, asking the same question several times, and giggling and gassing for hours on the phone. But the women who behave like men are worse. Women are good at being mothers, but not the women who try to be like men. When all women are like men, there will be no mothers. Therefore, there will not be anything of anything, and there will be no civilisation to gauge. That is all I have to say."

"You might call it a mouthful," I said, after a reflective pause. But Mrs. Beveridge was displeased.

"I don't think that's at all up to your usual standard," she said severely. "There's no use protesting, Willie. I *know* you can do better—much better. Anyway, the tone of that essay

isn't nice at all, not nice at all. No, indeed. I thought, when I sent you to a co-educational school, you would learn chivalry and respect and equality and all that sort of thing. What do you think, Mr. Levi?"

Mr. Levi tried to look non-committal but merely looked what he felt, embarrassed. There was a time when he would have enthusiastically supported the co-educational theory, but the New Educational Policy of the Soviet, with its very blunt and scathing reflections on the results of co-education, had taken the wind out of his sails and left them flapping. Unable to praise the Soviet present without calling attention to the failure of the Soviet past, he said nothing; which was a relief. Mrs. Beveridge turned to Mr. Baldero, as a more dependable ally. "What do *you* think?" she asked.

Mr. Baldero had taken no trouble at all to hide his boredom and scarcely any to hide his positive annoyance at having a schoolboy's essay inflicted on his peace. Now he blinked and looked vague.

"I wouldn't worry about Willie," he said. "All boys are like that, more or less, unless they're sissies."

"They're not like that in Russia," said Mr. Levi, with great firmness. "There is a comradeship of the sexes there, a sense of building up a new community, and, of course, equality is the very basis of their lives."

Mr. Baldero looked extremely doubtful, but Mr. Chatterjee came out in support of Mr. Levi.

"There is really no need for boys to be 'like that'," he said earnestly. "After all, the highest thought of all the ages has been directed towards unfolding the equality of women and impressing that lesson on man. Willie's ideas are surely not what you would expect in the land of John Stuart Mill. I think, Mrs. Beveridge, you are quite right in suspecting that Willie's education is not all it should be."

Mrs. Beveridge looked displeased, and very naturally. When a mother criticises her son, she shows the thinnest possible gratitude to those who agree with her. She flushed a little, and tried for something to say. I thought it would be kindly to make a diversion.

"Mr. Chatterjee," I said. "You appear to think that Willie is in a state of retarded civilisation, natural, perhaps, to his age."



Mr. Chatterjee looked embarrassed, but he could hardly deny the inference. "I suppose, then, that you hope Willie will have received the revelation of sex-equality before he qualifies for a vote and takes part in the government of the country."

"I'm sure he will," Mr. Chatterjee very heartily.

"Suppose he hasn't?" I asked.

"In that case," said Mr. Levi, "he will have no right to share in the government. Feudalism has no place in the modern world. A man who doesn't want to share every opportunity and experience with women is unfit to vote. Look at the honour Russia paid to Lenin's widow."

"Very well," I continued. "I presume that you agree with Mr. Levi. Will you tell me the status of women in India?"

"If you're thinking of Mohammedanism," Mr. Chatterjee replied with spirit, "ask your Imperialist friend, Mr. Jinnah."

Mr. Levi nodded and chuckled his approval. He really thought that Mr. Chatterjee had scored a telling point by refusing to answer.

"It was you I asked," I reminded Mr. Chatterjee, "and not Mr. Jinnah, who is not here. And I was not thinking of Mohammedanism. But, now that you mention them, do you want to take Mr. Jinnah's customers away from him?"

"I want the Indian nation to *be* a nation," said Mr. Chatterjee with vigour.

"That means 'Yes'," said Mr. Baldero.

"Taking it to mean 'Yes'," I went on, "is it not true that you can hardly wait for the political conversion of the Moslems. You want them to be in a united nation now. Will you wait till they abandon their harems and their theology before you give them a share in government?"

Mr. Levi laughed in a very hearty and superior way. "If you want to know about India," he said with eminent patronage, "you'd better forget the novels of Kipling. I thought you might have known that Congress makes *no* conditions with the Moslem League. As a matter of fact, Congress has made the most striking political gesture since Stalin settled the nationalities question. Congress has actually offered to accept a completely Moslem government."

"With their harems?" I asked, "and with their theology?" Mr. Chatterjee has told us that sex-equality is a prerequisite of a

civilised life, and that no man who refuses to accept sex-equality has a right to share in government. But he also tells us that Indian unity and self-government are a prime necessity, and, to secure that, he offers the Moslems not a share in, but the whole of the government of his country. He is therefore sacrificing his first absolute, sex-equality. If he wishes to make large, nationalistic gestures, he must forego John Stuart Mill."

This was more than Mr. Levi could stand. He pressed the starter and let himself go. He said that the economic miseries of India had been caused directly, and, indeed, deliberately, by capitalist oppression, that racial and religious divisions in India were calculatedly kept alive by the exploiters, that the toiling masses were panting to be free, and that the huge Indian potential for Democracy was being held in check by those who would rather face misery, famine, ruin and hatred than the victory of the common man. He did not mention women or their status at all.

I let him run on, considering his speech to be a form of entertainment, like a song, which should not be interrupted. When he was done, I returned to the point at issue.

"I must assume that you are ready to sacrifice John Stuart Mill to Mr. Jinnah," I said, "but there is more. Do you maintain that even the Hindu conception of a woman's function and status is what the centuries have been striving for? We have heard to-night, and not for the first time, of the honour that modern Russia paid to Lenin's widow. What about the honour that ancient India paid to quite ordinary widows, the widows of Mr. Levi's common man?"

"Suttee has been abolished for a long time," Mr. Chatterjee answered.

"Yes," I agreed. "It was abolished by capitalist oppression."

"It was hardly worse than English child-labour in the nineteenth century," said Mr. Levi pugnaciously.

"None the less," I answered, "there is a form of child labour still very common in India which is considerably worse than anything Marx found over here. With all respect to modern thought, the fulfilment of a woman's biological function is not always an expression of liberty."

Mr. Chatterjee looked more than pained.

"I know," I went on soothingly, "that many Indians are working nobly to wipe out the evil of too early marriage."

(I knew nothing of the kind, but it was very likely true, and it would please Mr. Chatterjee.) "But the very fact that they have this work to do indicates that sex-equality has still some centuries to travel in your native land. Would they get more, or less, official support, if the exploiters were removed? Are they working on an Indian or a European principle? Where did they learn the lesson they are trying to teach their fellow-countrymen?"

"I have already admitted the debt we owe to European thought," Mr. Chatterjee said stiffly.

"But I wish you would admit something else," I persisted. "You have got these ideas from the West. They are, as yet, very imperfectly assimilated. Yet, you want to break the connection with the West, the source."

"Not our intellectual connection," Mr. Chatterjee explained eagerly. "We will have more of that, not less, when we are free."

"What you propose," I suggested, "is an acutely self-conscious mastery of political affairs, coupled with moral and intellectual pupillarity. I think such a state of affairs cannot last."

Mr. Chatterjee objected to "pupillarity." He said that we of the West might learn something from the East. I agreed with him, for there is a great deal we must learn somewhere. But I thought we would not learn much from an imitation of ourselves, an Eastern reflection of the West.

"But we can do much, we can do everything, if only we put our heads together," Mr. Chatterjee cried with real enthusiasm.

That rubbed against a fixed idea of my own. It seems to me that we are not nearly at the stage of putting our heads together. So long as we entertain contradictory ideas and sentiments simultaneously, our first duty is for each to put the different bits of his own head together and look at it with disfavour.

Mr. Levi said impatiently that I was quibbling. There was no problem that could not readily be solved by the joint action of the toiling masses. If the heroic peasants of China, the starving artisans of Jarrow, the exploited negroes of the Deep South, the wretched miners of Silesia, the militant proletarians of France, the proud beggars of Castille, the gaunt Arabs of Morocco, the slaves of the Kimberley mines, the trampled Indians of Brazil and the free and hearty workers of Russia would only unite, they could do anything—

"Except unite," I suggested.

Willie Beveridge was indignant at the turn the conversation had taken. He had been told by his mother to write his essay over again, like a good boy, and he felt, with justice, that the talk interrupted his thoughts without giving him any ideas.

"What do you think, Mother?" he asked with a pointed exclusion of the rest of us. "You've got some sense."

Mrs. Beveridge was flattered by this generous and frank appeal, but she had very little to say.

"Well, Willie," she said, with some hesitation, "I think you ought to say that all civilised people respect women *naturally*, and they don't either oppress them or discuss them"—she gave us a resentful and indignant stare—"as if they were a trade union or something. And you should also say that all great men have admitted that they owed *everything* to their mothers."

That was too much for Willie, at his age.

"Here!" he said protestingly. "Is that true?"

"No," I said. "There was Strindberg for one."

"And Marx," said Mr. Levi.

"And Hitler," I added. "On the other hand, Mussolini has spoken most touchingly of mothers."

"Nearly all great men," Mrs. Beveridge amended, "and all *really* great men. They have been proud to admit their debt to their mothers. The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."

"One in the eye for Hitler," said Mr. Levi with satisfaction. "A bachelor."

"One in the eye for mothers," I objected. "When women are asked why they don't have children, the most common answer is that they won't bear sons to be killed in war. The hand that rocks the world rules the cradle."

"I can't write 'One in the eye for mothers' in my essay," Willie complained. "That's not really civilised. What else will I say, Mother?"

"I don't quite know," Mrs. Beveridge admitted. "Except chivalry and respect and, of course, equal rights and all that kind of thing."

"What do you think, Mr. Baldero?" Willie asked.

"I don't know much about it," Mr. Baldero answered with a yawn. "But I think women don't eat enough, and they worry too much. That makes them a bit unbalanced and edgy, and

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they're not much good in big affairs. They make a fuss about penny stamps and that kind of thing—you know what I mean. A woman in charge of an office will lie awake at nights trying to think of ways of catching out the office boy. They're very good at some jobs, of course, but they don't get much pay."

"Exploited," said Mr. Levi.

"You could call it that," Mr. Baldero agreed mildly. "But, if they let themselves be exploited, there must be something wrong with them, mustn't there? I don't mean something morally wrong, but some weakness."

That was no help to Willie, and it was very disturbing to Mr. Levi. He was drawing in his breath to make a start somewhere about the stage of chattel slavery, so I stepped in with some scattered observations of my own.

"Women," I said, "are the victims of our contemporary mania, which is to value everything by the politico-economic standard. This is unfortunate for women, whose remarkable virtues and distinctions lie elsewhere. It is also false, for the politico-economic standard is a measurable standard and therefore unadapted to human nature. For example, it was hoped that women would be very gratified by the vote. But a general issue of votes is like a hand-out of free tickets for a classical concert. It gratifies some much more than others. The people who are strongly and continuously interested in political affairs regard the vote, rightly, as an extension of their personality. But these are a small minority even among men, and among women are an almost invisible fraction. The person who has only a faint interest in politics has only a faint interest in the vote. Almost all women are like that.

"All round, it is difficult to find grounds of comparison between men and women. Women, on the whole, spend less money on themselves than men do, but they spend more money. They are the chief buyers of food, furniture and clothing. Many a woman who is proud of her self-sacrifice is, in fact, both greedy and selfish. She spends little on herself, but she allows her husband to spend no more, and the money that might have been wisely spent on a comfortable and cheerful life is flung wantonly away on a snobbish dressing up of the children and a snobbish decoration of the home. This is purely for the gratification of the woman, but she thinks she is a martyr to the family, and the

husband she exploits often thinks the same. Does the wife who spends money in this way get less pleasure from it than the man who spends money on beer? Every feminist will say she does, but a feminist is no more objective than a Communist.

"It is undoubtedly true that many working men, and others, conceal the size of their earnings from their wives and give them an unfairly small proportion, but the proposal to remedy this by law is merely an extravagance of the political obsession. The law may compel a man to hand over two-thirds of his wage, but it cannot prevent him from taking the money back again."

"What makes you think that women would lie down to that?" Mr. Levi asked.

"The fact that they lie down to the present unfairness," I answered. "The party which calls in the police is the weaker party, and the weakness reasserts itself when police interference reaches its necessary limits. If women were really equal to men on this standard, the concealment wouldn't last a fortnight. Nor would they remain underpaid as they are in every job where the rate is not fixed by political interference. A call for legislation is a call for help. It is the appeal of the weak, and, by economic standards, the weak are inferior. The insignificant number of women in Parliament, and their hardly more significant contribution to debate, strongly suggest that they are inferior by the political standard, also."

"They couldn't be worse than the men," said Mr. Levi.

"That is a glib, easy and false statement of the same order as 'Things couldn't be worse than they are now'," I replied. "Things *could* be worse than they are now. Women M.P.'s *could* be worse than men. They are."

"I deny that," said Mr. Levi stoutly. "Any way, there ought to be more women in Parliament. After all, women are new at the game. They've only been trying for a matter of twenty years or so. You've got to give them time—and opportunity."

It is a curious thing with advanced thinkers like Mr. Levi that they take liberties with time. They insist that huge, comprehensive and complicated reforms can be put into operation and made to bear results in a very few years, if not months. Any suggestion of slow and cautious handling, of modesty of hope, and lengthy preparation is brushed aside as timidity, if it is not denounced as a rearguard action of the forces of obstruction.



Once a progressive Report comes into their hands, they want to hand it over to Parliament with instructions to implement it at once, as Mr. Baldero might hand a business statement over to his secretary and tell her to put it into form for a board meeting and a vote of shareholders. Speed is the cry ; there is not a minute to lose.

But, when some colossal reform turns out to be disappointing, when the results of great efforts are not to be seen, then the hasty men become positively oriental in their patience. If a revolutionary government fails to reach the standards of liberal democracy, we are reminded that the revolutionaries have held power for no more than a generation and that great changes take time. Similarly with women. If feminism has not yet changed the character of women, we are urged to remember that women were writhing in chains up to the end of Victoria's reign and that they cannot be expected to reach the full height of their powers for many years, or generations, to come. I said none of this, for the discussion had become tiresome enough. Instead, I took up Mr. Levi's point.

"If there should be more women in Parliament," I said, "that may prove that the average woman candidate is politically fit, but surely it proves also that the women who refuse to vote for them are politically unfit. One way or another, women don't measure up to the political standard—yet."

"Who wants women in Parliament, anyway?" Mr. Baldero asked.

"I dare say you don't," said Mr. Levi with a happy sneer. "After all, you business men are not averse to having docile servants, with nobody to speak up for them."

"I don't think political women speak up for ordinary women," Mr. Baldero objected. "When they raised the age of conscription to include middle-aged women, a lot of men spoke up for them, but the women politicians let them down. At least, I think so."

"You think correctly," I added. "Political women were so enthusiastic about sex equality that they were quite willing to see women (other women, of course) being sent to work which was a great hardship for many of them. I myself heard a female politician say that women should be eligible for conscription to the coal pits."

"Well, indeed!" cried Mrs. Beveridge indignantly. "You call that equality for women."

"Why not?" Mr. Levi asked. "Let's be logical. If women accept political rights and power, they must accept the duties that go with it."

"If you are logical, you must distinguish," I objected. "The fact is that a few unrepresentative women accept political power, and the others are forced to accept the responsibilities."

"Trust a Fascist to produce an argument like that," said Mr. Levi scornfully.

"I don't think you've any right to call him a Fascist," said Mrs. Beveridge, her soul outraged.

"Don't bother," I said generously. "The word has lost all meaning. It has become, simply, a controversial noise. I am, in fact, much more anti-Fascist than Mr. Levi is. 'Fascist' is the word he uses when he has nothing intelligent to say. I wish he would understand that this habit implies that there is no intelligent answer to Fascism. But that is by the way. Mrs. Beveridge, do you want more women in Parliament?"

"Well, I'm not very enthusiastic," she admitted.

"Old prejudices die hard," said Mr. Levi with an understanding smile. "A woman who has been brought up on the old romantic stuff about the home is naturally against Woman as the equal partner."

"That's all very well," said Mr. Baldero with some impatience. "You're explaining why we don't want women in Parliament, but I'm asking who does?"

"Who does?" Mr. Levi repeated in surprise. "The Communist Party does. The Labour Party does. All the forces of Democracy does—I mean do."

"Then why don't they vote for them?" Mr. Baldero asked simply.

"They do," I explained. "But there aren't enough of them. The forces of Democracy are a rather exclusive band."

"Democracy itself insists on equal representation," said Mr. Levi firmly.

"But the democrats don't," I answered. "There is a gulf between Democracy and democrats—an alarming gulf. The width of that gulf is perhaps the gauge of our civilisation."

Willie brightened up suddenly.

"I think there is an awful gulf between Woman and women," he said. "I mean to say, Woman is a lot of hooey, but women are real, anyway."

"Try that idea on Mr. Gudgeon," I advised. "If he applies it to the difference between Education and teaching, it may do him a world of good."

## Chapter Three

### PROVERBIAL PHILOSOPHY

MRS. BEVERIDGE is rather fond of quoting popular proverbs. She believes that they express the really solid wisdom of human experience. Mr. Levi is inclined to agree with her, for he regards proverbs, rather rashly, as the wisdom of the Common People, and a proof that the Masses are fully as capable of analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction, analogy and apologue as any of the pampered products of the so-called public schools. Mr. Chatterjee misses the savour and, sometimes, the literal meaning of our proverbs, and is doubtful of his position.

Proverbs are not a topic I had ever thought much about, but when Mr. Levi gave us his ideological interpretation, I had to contradict him ; for the general absurdity and unhealthy venom of his principles have to be met at all times. So, I offered to defend the proposition that popular proverbs offered evidence of the Common People's incapacity for serious thought, and of the acute anxiety of the Masses to avoid any mental exertion whatever. This was admittedly a highly disputable statement, but I made it without shame, for I cannot imagine anything more democratic than to treat the Masses with the same loose censoriousness as we treat the privileged few. It is a very real expression of egalitarianism.

Mr. Levi cannot see it that way. He talks about the Boss Class with unbridled hostility, believing the worst of them on all occasions, but he quite sincerely resents any criticism of the

workers as being unfair. He feels that the equality of the workers cannot be securely maintained, unless they are given a handicap of at least two strokes a hole in every argument. This I think to be against the spirit of Democracy. Mr. Levi, as I have mentioned, thinks otherwise.

He asked me if I really believed that stupidity was found only among the proletariat, and made some biting references to nincompoops in the House of Lords. As I had suddenly thought of something to say about proverbs and wanted a chance to say it, I admitted hastily that if money were as evenly distributed as stupidity, we would be much nearer economic equality than, in fact, we are. This concession satisfied Mr. Levi, more or less, and he allowed me to develop my case.

I reminded him that the shrewd saws of our ancestors frequently contradicted each other. This fact has often been remarked upon, but I could not remember that much effort had been made to find an explanation ; and yet the explanation was not obscure. The fact that proverbs contradict each other is the secret of their attraction, for desire to believe contradictory things is one of the most tenacious of human instincts. Nothing infuriates a man more than to be reminded that two propositions, each necessary to the comfort of his prejudices, cancel each other.

That is one of the reasons why I have always regarded the Socratic dialogues as thoroughly unrealistic. The victims kept their tempers. Also, to every question put by Socrates, a relevant answer was given. That this should happen even half the time would be astonishing in the highest civilisation ; that it should happen always is quite incredible. But the docility and candour of the characters is equally incredible. So far as I could remember, every man called upon to reconsider the incompatibility of two opinions, frankly admitted that one or the other must be wrong, and none ever returned, later in the argument, to restate a position that had previously been abandoned. A good-humoured recognition of an untenable position is common enough among players of draughts or chess, but it is almost unknown among men defending a prejudice. For example, Socrates might easily lead a modern Progressive into declaring that it was snobbish, callous and unjust to expect the very poor to be good, and also into declaring that only the very poor *are* good, but he would never persuade the Progressive

to admit his inconsistency with a sporting smile. On the contrary. The Progressive would become violently angry and would talk bitterly about the sneering superiority of a privileged handful, or the iniquity of the Means Test, or the locking of first-class carriages, or the infamous tyranny of Blanco in the Army, or any other topic that lends itself to shouting.

When I had got so far as this, Mrs. Beveridge pursed her lips disapprovingly, as she always does when she considers that I am "baiting" Mr. Levi; which means speaking as disrespectfully of Mr. Levi's views as he speaks of the views he imagines to be mine. She said that I was straying far from the topic of proverbs.

I said that, on the contrary, I had been steadily approaching the topic and had now arrived. Proverbs, I maintained, were very helpful in disguising the inconsistency of our opinions; and the secret of the disguise was the employment of images. The importance of the image was easily seen in the proverbs which were more or less literal. "Penny wise, pound foolish"; "Always take care of the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves"—the inconsistency of these proverbs was obvious. But the case was altered with metaphorical proverbs. "A straw shows the way the wind blows," but, "One swallow doesn't make a summer." It is possible to quote these aphorisms in close succession without discomfort.

Mr. Chatterjee, who had been listening with a very agreeable appearance of interest, said that these aphorisms were surely true. I said, No—the images were true, *as images*, but false as analogies. A straw shows the way the wind blows, but a single instance does not prove a general rule. Similarly, a rolling stone does fail to gather moss, but a wandering man may pick up a lot of money. The image is satisfying, but the inference is frequently false.

I added that proverbial images were extraordinarily good examples of the right use of metaphor, because, apart from lending a false validity to the argument, they did not lead the mind away, they did not distract. I ventured to call them centripetal images because they brought the mind back to the thought, in contrast to centrifugal images, so commonly found in metaphysical and romantic poetry.

This distinction interested Willie Beveridge, who was anxious to get it right, so that he might vex and harass his teacher,

Mr. Gudgeon, with a bit of "English" that wasn't in the text book. To make the matter clearer, I referred to Chaucer's description of the Carpenter's Wife, who was as tall as a mast and straight as a bolt. The image is simple and quite incongruous with the female referred to, except in the one thing to be illustrated, so that the mind abstracts the reference and returns to the object. On the other hand, the centrifugal image is enjoyed too much for its own sake, it has a life of its own, it is often disproportioned to the object ; it draws the mind away. I instanced the seaweed simile in Shelley's Ode to the West Wind, and gave that poet a general dishonourable mention for the loose irrelevance of his illustrations.

Mr. Chatterjee disagreed. He thought I was pedantic. He said that if a poem was beautiful for its metaphors, it was beautiful enough, as the variations on a simple theme in music might be arbitrary and yet satisfying. I said I very much doubted if variations in music ever could be quite arbitrary, and I imagined that relevance was imposed by the very nature of music. Mr. Chatterjee then suggested very pleasantly indeed that, as I admitted to knowing nothing about music, my doubts and my imaginings were of no value whatever ; which I had to admit. But I maintained that, for poetry, what was unsound could not be fully satisfactory, and I asked him to advance an instance to the contrary.

Mrs. Beveridge offered one, and one that could not have been bettered if she had been rushing to my aid. As a young girl, she had accidentally read a few lines by Shelley which had deeply impressed her. It was something about the moon, she said, coming out in a veil, and not feeling very well, if she remembered right. She was referring, of course, to the famous fragment :

And, like a dying lady, lean and pale,  
Who totters forth, wrapp'd in a gauzy veil  
Out of her chamber, led by the insane  
And feeble wanderings of her fading brain  
The moon arose up in the murky East  
A white and shapeless mass.

I quoted the lines, more or less accurately, and said I could think of no better example of the falsity of the centrifugal image. The notion of insanity, I thought, was suggested, not at all by

the moon, but by the image, and it was a typical romantic extravagance. But there was a more patent falsity. The moon which was likened, in the image, to a lean old woman, was directly described, when the image was dropped, as a white and shapeless mass. Image and object were in contradiction. It was as if Shelley had prepared us for the entry of Miss Havisham and had then ushered in the fat white woman whom nobody loved. The image was picturesque but entirely invalid.

I suggested to Willie that if he ever had to write a University thesis on literature (and stranger things happen in Universities), he might do worse than study this perversion of the metaphor. I fancied, without knowing enough to be confident, that the thing became serious about the time of the Reformation, when men ceased to subordinate their notions, and got quite out of hand with the Romantic anarchy. As an extreme example of this vice, I referred to the opening of Tennyson's "Dream of Fair Women":

As when a man, that sails in a balloon,  
 Downlooking sees the solid shining ground  
 Stream from beneath him in the broad blue moon,—  
 Tilth, hamlet, mead and mound :  
 And takes his flags and waves them to the mob  
 That shout below, all faces turned to where  
 Glows ruby-like the far-off crimson globe,  
 Filled with a finer air.  
 So, lifted high the poet at his will  
 Lets the great world float from him, seeing all—

And so on.

Wordsworth said the same thing with infinitely greater effect in a single line :

I wandered lonely as a cloud.

Even that, I thought, was out of proportion. It was too absorbent of the imagination, and too big for the rest of the poem.

Mr. Levi suggested that I was again drifting from the point, which was the salty sagacity of the people, as expressed in proverbs, but I continued to disagree with him, and insisted that we should rather consider the apt deceitfulness of the images. Very few people have either the will or the ability to think with

logical consistency, but a kind of poetic quality of the mind is much more common. Thinking in pictures is primitive thinking, but it has the merits of the primitive ; it is simple, direct and vigorous.

Mr. Levi wouldn't have this at all. It is part of his faith that the ordinary man or woman who has been denied the benefits of higher education can yet understand any problem that is put in intelligible English.

This means, of course, that the ordinary man can understand what he can understand. I admitted that the awkward phrasing made extra difficulties in, say, "Capital" or the "Critique of Pure Reason," but these works were intrinsically difficult, and could not be put in such English as an ordinary uneducated man could understand. The attempt had been made with Marx, and the result was a distorted and imperfect version of what the man really said. I did not tell Mr. Levi that my clearest memories of the Critique were a headache and a sense of exasperation. Instead, I asked him what he thought of Lady Alicia Marble, who was then standing as a Conservative candidate for Parliament. She was an ordinary woman who had been sent to a very bad expensive school and had thus been denied the advantages of higher education. I thought, myself, that she was not capable of casting a vote, much less of sitting in Parliament. What did Mr. Levi think of this ordinary woman ?

Mr. Levi said it was a mere quibble to call this woman ordinary. She had never had to scrub a floor, wash a baby, bring up a family on a starvation wage or sharpen her wits against the contemptible inquisition of the Means Test. He rather funked the inference that these experiences were a sufficient preparation for an understanding of Marx and Kant, but he did suggest that they gave a sound appreciation of the class-struggle, which was all that was required for a valuation, if not an actual understanding, of the higher thought.

The case of Sir John McCrink, another Conservative candidate, presented an even more acute ideological difficulty. Sir John was born, and spent his early years, fathoms below the Rowntree level of subsistence. He was brutally treated in his Belfast home by a father whose two passions were strong drink and the Orange Order. Time and again, household ornaments and more useful articles were pawned to satisfy the family hunger



that had been created by the father's thirst and the System. As a young employee, he was shockingly exploited, and he saw his sweated sister die of consumption. Sir John had surely had a hard and sound proletarian education, and he had clearly understood the realities of the class-struggle. But he was now a wealthy and greedy man. The exploited had turned exploiter, the victim victimiser. In his business dealings, he was lying, cruel, dirty and dishonest—and much given to quoting proverbs to his purpose. In public life, he was an ignorant, stupid, bigoted bull. Yet he was an ordinary man, who had enjoyed the essential working-class training.

Mr. Baldero joined in. He said he thought my attack on Sir John was a bit steep. No doubt he was a bit of a rough diamond, but men of that kind often gave away a lot in private. Anyway, it was ridiculous to call him a stupid bull. It took brains to build up a big business. Perhaps McCrink wasn't over-scrupulous, but you didn't make a fortune simply by being dishonest. If you did, the country would be stiff with millionaires. But you needed more than dishonesty. You needed talent and hard work and courage.

This was nothing to the point. Mr. Baldero was defending McCrink, not because he thought well of him, but because he thought that an attack on that rogue was an attack on his own kind, and therefore an attack on himself. He was thinking primitively.

But I had seen Sir John McCrink and had heard him speak. I called him a bull because he looked like a bull. He had a fat, square, heavy face and a small, red wicked eye. He was grossly built, but he could not be called soft, for there was still plenty of muscle slowly degenerating beneath the accumulating grease. His voice and accent were vile, and it was plain that he did not understand even half of the speech he had bought and clumsily memorised. I said this to Mr. Baldero with some vigour. I like him, but he is class-bound.

Mr. Levi so much approved of my denunciation that he refused to consider McCrink's credentials as one of the dialectical intelligentsia, or to consider the inconsistency of saying that poverty is at once degrading and elevating to the mind. I hoped he did not like my attack because he, like Mr. Baldero, imagined it to be an attack on Mr. Baldero.

Mrs. Beveridge disliked it. She has a simple and rather

out-of-date view of the knighthood and baronetcy. It is quite enough for her that Sir John is called Sir John. I wonder what she thinks of Sir Stafford Cripps.

"Well," she said acidly, "I don't think much of *your* consistency, though you're always talking about it. You start by running down ordinary people and you end by running down Sir John McCrink and Lady Marble."

"But they *are* ordinary people," I protested. "All that glisters is not gold, you know."

"And now you're quoting a proverb," she cried in triumph. "After running *them* down."

I could have told her that I had not run down proverbs, but had merely said that while they were pictorially very interesting, they were not to be used as arguments, but only as illustrations. However, I knew that I would exasperate the whole company by making this claim. They are all convinced that I am a twisting and inconsistent debater, quite simply because I keep saying the same thing. They shift their own ground so often and with such complete unconsciousness that I seem to be moving dizzily round them. It is an illusion, like the illusion of the sun moving round the earth. Only Mr. Chatterjee has occasional misgivings about the Ptolemaic prejudice of the group. He heartened me now by saying that he liked my point about the ordinariness of titled people. It was truly democratic to insist that persons of rank might be essentially mediocre, or worse. Not only that, but they might claim the honourable title of ordinariness. This was cheering, but my heart sank again when Mr. Chatterjee came to his conclusion. Congress, he said, was often unjustly criticised because it had wealthy men like Mr. Birla among its supporters; but these men were really ordinary. So Mr. Chatterjee, too, was playing for his own hand.

Mr. Levi pursed his lips at the mention of Mr. Birla. As a Communist, he regarded that man as an exploiter of the masses, but the party line dictated approval of his nationalistic activities. There were two prejudices in his mind, but there was only one Mr. Birla. "Do you agree with that?" asked Mrs. Beveridge, sensing his difficulty.

"He's trying to think of a proverb," suggested Mr. Chatterjee good-naturedly.

"No," I said ill-naturedly. "He's trying to think of two."

## Chapter Four

### A JOLLY EVENING

OUR supper table population is rather fluctuating. We have had two recent additions to our regulars. One of them, a Miss Lake, is a nice, quiet, unnoticeable girl, who is some kind of secretary. She hardly ever says anything, and is not likely to be with us long. But the other addition is a very different pair of shoes, and, so far, he has said nothing at all.

He is Mr. Ignatius Slattery, the distinguished modern poet. That is to say, he has won a considerable reputation by difficult and remarkable verses, but he does not attempt to live by his lyre. He is an equally distinguished expert on pigs and is so highly regarded in the world of pig critics and economists that he has a job which he can do without ever going near a farm. Some day the top-notch experts will make for themselves technical jobs with high salaries which they can do without getting out of bed, or even stretching themselves.

Mr. Slattery is a highbrow. His face is rather long and his hair is jet black. I should say he is about thirty-five, and would very likely be interesting to women, for there is force and intelligence in his expression. There is a suggestion of a sarcastic temperament about his mouth and his eye is acute and wary. He looks as if he should be a stout argufying man, and I have been waiting for some nights till he fires the first shot.

But this pleasure has had to be postponed, for we have had visitors from the outside world, and Mr. Slattery at once resumed his watchful silence, just when I had hoped he would open up. I was sorry for the interruption, and was sorrier still before the night was over. It was Mrs. Beveridge's nephew who came to see us, and he brought a friend.

We have heard a good deal of this nephew, from Mrs. Beveridge's innocent chatter. His name is Reggie. He has a commission in a rather good regiment. It appears that his Colonel has a special favour for him, that the General stood him a sherry, that he is simply adored by his batman and, indeed, by all the other ranks. He writes the most amusing letters, and plays the most amusing pranks, and is altogether a dear boy.

That is the picture we got from Mrs. Beveridge, but Reggie gave us a rather different version of himself.

He came to supper, quite unexpectedly and uninvited, with a friend called sometimes Beans, and, sometimes, Pork. The aunt was delighted, for she has managed to convey to us in delicate ways that she has come down some stairs in the world, and the appearance of a stylish and upper-class nephew, dropping in in the most casual family way, would build up her social legend for months. She introduced Reggie, and then Beans, with fluttering pleasure.

Reggie said brightly, to nobody in particular, that he and his chum had just dropped in to eat some of his aunt's rations. He laughed. Beans laughed. Mrs. Beveridge smiled. Nobody else was amused, for it was very clear that Reggie was doing exactly what he announced, and a frank and engaging admission of selfishness is seldom amusing. Besides, they were our rations.

Reggie is really quite good-looking, in a youthful, cinematic way, and he carries his uniform well, if too conspicuously. His friend Beans is of a heavier and rather greasier type, but is equally pleased with himself. He is a civilian, but exudes a certain army air.

Mrs. Beveridge made haste for the kitchen and left us to chat with the dear boys, but the boys showed no need of our company. They looked behind us, above us, beyond us and through us, and then stood chatting together, with many confidential giggles. But there was on their faces that otherworldly expression, that air of supersensuous awareness that you so often see on the faces of young men who are waiting for a drink and are not absolutely sure of getting it. There was no doubt that Mrs. Beveridge's standing with her nephew, and his with Beans, or Pork, depended on the introduction of some alcohol. Gradually the two young men stopped talking and stood, quite forgetful of our presence, and absorbed in listening for an encouraging clink of glass or a whispered instruction to a maid.

It was impolite, to put it mildly, and I was interested to watch the responses of the company. Mr. Slattery, after one appraising look, had sunk back into silent thought. Miss Lake was perfectly at ease. Probably her work brought her into contact with quite a number of young men such as these, and she found the pose of aloofness the most tolerable they could assume. Mr. Baldero,

like Mr. Slattery, had given them one glance, from under his eyebrows, summed them up and found the answer negligible. Mr. Chatterjee was polite, but fidgety and wary. There were too many memories in his mind to allow him to imitate the calm indifference of Mr. Baldero. But, at least, he was able to behave as usual. He exchanged small talk with us and was politely friendly to Miss Lake as a newcomer.

The case of Mr. Levi was sadly different. He was suffering so much from ideological rage that it spoke in his accent and his eyes. Young Reggie was Privilege, the insolence of wealth and the pride of caste. But, unfortunately, he was not easily reducible to vulgar caricature. A cartoonist might have exaggerated a certain vacuity of expression, but no cartoon which made him less than good-looking and easily confident would have had any point or reality.

Young Reggie would undoubtedly take a trick with many women, even with many of Mr. Levi's political sisters. Also, he was cool and superior, and he seemed to be maddeningly ready to ignore Mr. Levi's existence, for his aunt's sake, just as he might have ignored some defect in the domestic arrangements. But it was also clear that, while he would cheerfully put up with Mr. Levi, he couldn't put up with an absence of drink.

Mrs. Beveridge came back just as Reggie had begun to bridge the social gap with some remarks of condescending gallantry, addressed to the typist. Mrs. Beveridge looked less well than usual. She belongs to a physical type which I find rather trying. She is not fat, but she definitely carries weight. She looks about fifty and thinks she looks about forty. When she was forty, she probably looked the same. She gives the impression that she would dress well, if she had more money—if you know what I mean—and, however little powder she has on, it always looks too much. In appearance she is a woman of firm intention but indeterminate outline, and her social attitude is much the same. Her slightly crimson complexion was much deepened, for the moment, and she was carrying a heavy tray.

"Perhaps Mr. Baldero will give us all a little drink," she said, looking round with a bright, proud eye.

She had certainly done us well. There was gin and whisky and sherry on the tray. We had never been told about this treasure, but, then, none of us could call her Aunt.

Reggie said, "By Jove" in a tone that was meant to be both surprised and complimentary, and was neither. He turned to Beans. "Well, Pork, it was quite an idea to come here, eh?"

"Rather," said Pork, as if he was being rather obliging in consenting to drink something; but he kept his eye on the tray.

Mr. Baldero did the job of serving with his usual neat and calm competence. He asked Miss Lake and Mrs. Beveridge what they would have, and then did the same for the other guests. But, when he came to Reggie and Beans, he said, "You'll stick to whisky." He said it dispassionately, but with authority. It was an instruction, and an intimation to them that they were quite clearly intoxicated. They were slightly disconcerted and even annoyed, and they looked at the modest measure he gave them with a sour eye; but they did what they were told. Mr. Levi was even more disconcerted, for Mr. Baldero, who had previously passed him over, now cocked an eye in his direction and said, "Nothing for you, I suppose?" This was a most grievous anticipation, for Mr. Levi was waiting to be asked, and was rehearsing the tone of a short, sharp and contemptuous refusal, which, he hoped, would spoil the party for everyone. He had meant to make sure that nobody should mistake him for a friendly member of the group, and, instead, he was merely being mistaken for a teetotaller.

Reggie and Beans scoffed their drinks in a very practised way and stood dangling their glasses till Mrs. Beveridge urged them to help themselves. This they did, more amply than was good for them, but less than they would have done, if they had been able to ignore Mr. Baldero's eye. He knew that they were two young men who had spent all their money and had come to the most convenient place for free drinks and a meal, and he managed to convey that knowledge in a way that they resented, but could not openly object to.

When supper was announced, they helped themselves again, with joking apologies for the damage they were doing to the bottle. They also said that the room was very hot, which was the same thing as announcing that they were feeling rather drunk. When they sat down to supper, they set about making themselves agreeable by talking in a free and friendly manner to each other. Reggie told Beans, surely not for the first time,

what a bad show it was that he had been turned down for the Army and had to go into—whatever it was.

"Pigs," said Beans. "Amusing, isn't it?"

Mr. Slattery's mouth tightened, and a gleam shone in his eye. He had placed Pork, and placed him very far beneath himself, nearly as far away as the actual pigs. But Beans was so far below that he didn't recognise Mr. Slattery.

"No use trying again, even now?" asked Reggie, like a friendly counsel.

Beans shrugged his shoulders.

"What can a fellow do," he asked, "when some mandarin at the Ministry says he's indispensable, or some rot like that. It's absolute bilge, of course, for there's really nothing in my job. But the mandarins insist that I've got some rather special knowledge—though God knows what it is. Then there are the medical wallahs putting a spanner in the works. You'd think a chap who played rugger and cricket pretty regularly would be fit enough for anything, but they say, No. So there you are."

Reggie had listened with respectful interest to all this.

"What exactly is your job?" he asked, absent-mindedly pouring himself and Beans another large drink.

Beans stuck his chin out and said in a very firm and laconic way :

"Chiefly seeing that other fellows do theirs."

It went on like that all through the meal. Reggie made some schoolboy comments on military affairs, in the casual-seeming manner of the expert. When his aunt tried pathetically to draw him out on his own fighting activities, he became steadily sillier and sillier. He was the kind of youth who greatly likes to talk about not talking about himself. After a while, Beans seemed to think that he was not being given his fair share of being the strong, silent English gentleman, so he favoured us with some comments on the miners. These would have been very clear-cut and incisive, if Beans had only been able to articulate his words with more confidence ; but Reggie agreed with the social views of his chum, though they sounded as though they were coming through flannel.

"Yes," he said. "They're drawing down a lot of money, these johnnies—more than we are—but they don't seem too keen on doing anything for it, do they?"

This was altogether too much for Mr. Levi. He had taken great care not to listen to anything said during the meal, but he could bear no more.

"Would you tell me what the miners have to fight for?" he asked.

Reggie looked down his nose.

"We're not asking them to fight," he said. "We're only asking them to dig a bit of coal. It's not much to ask a miner—at least I shouldn't think so."

"How would you like to dig coal?" demanded Mr. Levi with venom.

"How would you like to fight?" retorted Reggie.

This was a better answer than he knew, for Mr. Levi had been a successful appellant on conscientious grounds in the days when Stalin was sworn not to pull our chestnuts out of the fire. He had changed his mind at the time that Stalin had had his mind changed for him, but, though he became enthusiastic for bloody attack everywhere and anywhere, he never brought himself to revise his conscience within the hearing of a recruiting officer. Therefore, the flood of figures he poured forth about the hardships of the mining life seemed to all of us, including himself, to be no answer to the question. But he persisted, with increasing bitterness and lack of restraint, till Reggie turned away and began chatting through his tirade at Beans.

Fortunately the meal came to an unscandalous end. Mrs. Beveridge, in an agony of social misery and tact, ushered her visitors, who were wavering gently like sea polyps, out of the room. Reggie turned in the doorway and cast one longing, lingering look at the bottles, but Mrs. Beveridge was too agitated to take the hint, and he disappeared through the door, not to return.

"Silence like a poultice came, to heal the blows of sound." It would have been much better if the silence had stayed, for there was really nothing to say. But Mr. Levi was in a very bad emotional state, and he could not contain himself for long.

"What do you think of that?" he asked, with the half-hysterical venom of a thwarted, vicious-tempered child. "There's your officer class for you. There's your public school boy. These are the people the workers aren't good enough for. That's the system we're fighting for."



It was interesting to see what the guests did think of them. Mr. Slattery was quite indifferent. They had come and they had gone. He had no doubt that when Pork found out who Mr. Slattery was, he would feel very sick, but that neither pleased nor vexed him. Mr. Baldero was equally calm. He could place those two where they belonged. As a business man, it was very likely that, after the war, he would have the task of hiring and firing a number of their kind. He may even have felt slightly sorry for them. Miss Lake almost certainly did. She knew the type as well as Mr. Baldero did, and knew that they were seldom competent.

Nobody answered Mr. Levi at first, and then Mr. Chatterjee spoke.

"I'm sorry for Mrs. Beveridge," he said.

"You would be," replied Mr. Levi with hot scorn. "Well, I'm not. She's his aunt, isn't she? Isn't she proud of him? Hasn't she told us all about his cricket colours and his swell club and all the rest of that tosh? Well, we've seen him now. That's what the public schools produce—a bounder, a cad."

It was characteristic of Mr. Levi that he thought he was condemning public school ethics with particular effect, when he used public school terms of condemnation, whereas he was committing himself to public school standards and condemning himself. I wondered if he really believed that talk. In his heart, did he believe that a dominant class would commit their young to a system which *tried* to produce persons like Reggie and Beans? Did he think the system or the class could long survive such a product if it was characteristic? Who invented the word "cad," if Reggie's teachers were like Reggie?

"I don't like public schools," said Mr. Slattery. "I was at one. But that's not the kind of thing they usually turn out. They do produce a few like that, but they don't like them."

That was common sense, and it was first-hand evidence; but it wouldn't do for Mr. Levi. In his way, he was just as bad as the two young scapegraces who had left us, and he was more characteristic. They were insolent; he was vicious. They were full of condescending class bigotry; he was full of malicious class bigotry. They wanted to cut him dead; he wanted to shoot them dead. They had insulted their hostess in culpable ignorance; he had insulted her in culpable knowledge. They

were drunk ; he was sober. It was possible that, in the morning, Reggie at least, might feel ashamed of himself, and would very likely make some kind of apology. Mr. Levi, less probably, might feel ashamed, but he wouldn't apologise. Nor would he admit that men who won't apologise shouldn't talk about cads.

For my part, I wondered if all revolutionary moods and movements have been so marked as ours are by meanness and small vindictiveness of mind. It was meanness that had beaten Mr. Levi in his snarling attack on young Reggie's superior sneer, and it was rankling meanness that prevented him from understanding that Reggie had lost in a much more serious way by making his aunt ashamed of him.

I was among those who were slightly sorry for Reggie, now that he was out of the room. At twenty-one he was offensive, but he might change before he was forty. If he didn't, he would be pathetic, still talking about his cricket colours and the good old days with the regiment when he wouldn't be able even to marry because he would never make enough money to support one-tenth of his pretensions. Of course, he might be killed in war much earlier. I mentioned this to Mr. Levi in mitigation of his wrath, but he refused to admit that Reggie had any right to die for the good cause, and suggested that he would probably sneak a safe job for himself. This, coming from Mr. Levi, was richly rank, but, coming from anybody, it would still have been unjust, for there was nothing in Reggie's particular offensiveness to suggest that he was a coward or unwilling to do his duty. It was even possible that he *was* popular with his batman, and was perhaps very nice to him, when he was sober and nobody was looking.

Mr. Chatterjee came nobly to my support. He was touched by Mrs. Beveridge's distress, and shocked by Mr. Levi's. He said he was quite sure that Reggie would do his military duty, no matter what his failings were, and he urged us to forget this evening, for the sake of Mrs. Beveridge.

He said this so graciously and with such honesty of feeling that I was tempted to risk another explosion from the Left by asking him what he really thought of the two painful specimens who had made the trouble.

"They were very rude," he said, with precise care. "I think you could say they were insolent. But I didn't imagine that most

young men of their class and upbringing would behave like that among their own people, in a room like this. I'm sure most of their companions would be very disgusted with them. But you must forgive me for saying that a much larger number of that type, including many nice, honest and kindly young men, *would* behave in that way, in *my* room, in India."

"Now, now," said Mr. Baldero rather irritably. "That's a bit thick. Some of our best young fellows go to India."

"I quite agree," Mr. Chatterjee said, all candour and conviction. "Excellent young men go to India, and they mean to behave well. But they don't."

"They don't behave like that, anyway," answered Mr. Baldero.

"Stop and think how these young men *did* behave," said Mr. Chatterjee. "They didn't say rude things, they didn't laugh in your faces, they didn't throw things at you or kick you out of the road. They just tried to have as little to do with you as possible. They didn't want to know you. I don't think you would have had any serious complaint against their conduct if you had met them in a railway carriage or some other strange place. But you had reason for complaint because they behaved that way in a room that you regard as partly yours. That's how some of your best young men behave in India, which is entirely my room. They are bored by the presence of four hundred million Indians, in India. One of your writers talked about the Englishman straining his beloved India to his bosom. That is no longer true, if it ever was. India is administered by men who are just doing a job, not by men who are working for, and with, other men."

"Surely they're not all like that," I protested.

"Not all," Mr. Chatterjee admitted. "But too many."

"What do you call too many?" growled Mr. Baldero.

"Any," said Mr. Chatterjee, "is too many."

## Chapter Five

### DEAD SEA FRUIT

**M**R. LEVI has been fidgety for the past two or three evenings. The cause of his fidgets is Mr. Slattery. Being a modern poet and a man of scientific attainments, Mr. Slattery ought to be a "natural" for Mr. Levi's ideas. He ought to be forward-looking and confidently sure that the day of privilege is past. But, is he? He has proved himself much more ready to listen than to talk, and that is a very bad sign, to a progressive. Mr. Levi likes to know where he is with everybody, so he has been trying to get Mr. Slattery to open his heart.

His method is sufficiently obvious. He engages Mr. Chatterjee in conversation and puts ideas before him, asking for his concurrence. But, instead of looking at Mr. Chatterjee, he looks at Mr. Slattery. If Mr. Chatterjee agrees with the view advanced, Mr. Levi nods and says he rather fancies that all forward-looking people think the same; and again he looks at Mr. Slattery. If Mr. Chatterjee disagrees, he is pained, and looks to see if Mr. Slattery is also pained.

He started last night on the subject of War. He said that War was a bitter, damnable, destructive and altogether vile institution. Mr. Chatterjee naturally seconded him and said that bloodshed could in no circumstances be justified. Mr. Levi, of course, would not go so far as that. Any military action taken by Russia was self-evidently justified.

"Look at the self-sacrifice, the heroism shown by the Russian people," he urged. "Look at their unity—each for all, all for each. War fused the Russian soul into a white-hot spiritual element. You could feel it positively pulsing through—through the voice of Joseph McLeod. There's no use being sentimental, you know. War can be a great deliverer and purifier."

"That is what the poet Rupert Brooke said," rejoined Mr. Chatterjee. "I have heard you laughing at him."

"But he wasn't writing about the Russian war," Mr. Levi replied. "He was writing about the Imperialist slaughter of 1914."

Mr. Slattery was listening with a little show of interest. He now answered Mr. Levi's unspeaking glance.

"There was a good deal of sacrifice in that war, too," he said, mildly.

"Yes, among the common people," Mr. Levi admitted. "But what happened? It was simply exploited by selfish interests, and all the sacrifice was thrown away. The only value of an Imperialist war is to put arms in the hands of the People. If it ends in the seizure of power by the common folk who have won the war, then it is justified. But, usually, it ends by riveting the chains more firmly on the toiling masses. Remember the Coupon Election, and the betrayal of the workers afterwards."

"But, surely the people voted for the Coupon government," I said.

"They did," Mr. Levi admitted, "because an election was rushed on them at a time when an imaginary victory had gone to their heads. They were led up the garden path by promises of homes for heroes."

"They never came down again," I objected. "At no time between the wars did Labour gain a majority."

"No wonder," retorted Mr. Levi. "Just think of what the Labour Party was like—an effete gang of class quislings and bourgeois."

"Then why didn't the people vote for the Communist Party?" I asked. "Communists are quislings, but they are not class quislings. Why didn't they get the votes of the toiling masses?"

"The Communist Party never set out to be a mass party," Mr. Levi explained. "They have acted as the spearhead of the workers' movement. They are an elite."

"An elite means a chosen body," I answered. "Who chose them? They were admittedly not chosen by God, and they were not chosen by the people. Were they chosen by themselves?"

"In every great issue," said Mr. Levi proudly, "the workers instinctively turn to the Communist Party for a lead. Just think of the unemployed workers' movement and the hunger marches."

"Did the miners instinctively turn when the Communist Party turned?" asked Mr. Slattery. "Did they follow the new Communist lead on strikes in 1941?"

Mr. Levi fizzed at once, as he does at any mention of the

miners, but he was unable to deny directly and pointedly that his party had made a rather unconvincing showing in the coal districts. But he had a full explanation. The workers, and particularly the miners, had been already disillusioned. In fact, they had been disillusioned before the war began at all. They had seen their fondest hopes dashed to the ground before they had begun to cherish them, and they had only been saved from having their trust betrayed again by the fact that they had refused to trust anybody. Still, they felt disillusioned, like a careful man who had been given a bad tip for a race ; he hasn't backed the horse, but, nevertheless, he feels a good deal poorer and rather bitter when the horse loses.

"It was rather different at the time of Dunkirk," Mr. Levi conceded, forgetting that at that time he was doing his best to secure a peace of surrender. "Then the people thought they had something to fight for."

"What?" I asked.

"A better Britain," said Mr. Levi. "A country where all worked without thought of self, and class distinctions and privileges were unknown, a country where unemployment would be only a grisly memory and all children would have an equal chance of improving themselves, and all adults would have an equal chance of fulfilling themselves, a country where the economics of scarcity had been abolished by the economics of plenty, a country where servility was unknown and where no man could lord it over his fellows simply because he had money, a country which had cast off its feudal shackles and all the injustices of the past——"

Mr. Levi did not stop there, but my attention wandered, and so did Mr. Slattery's. I wondered what Mr. Levi thought it was that made men take this glowing view of the future in June, 1940, when they had taken a completely gloomy view in May of the same year. Why did they suddenly feel that they were fighting for a great and promising cause? It was the same cause as in May. No doubt they had confidence in Mr. Churchill, if in none of the new men who came into office after the resignation of Chamberlain. But it would be very false to say that Mr. Churchill filled them with a glowing vision of a world where there would be no class distinctions and war should be no more. On the contrary. People regarded Mr. Churchill as a crusted

old Tory, an aristocrat and an Imperialist. They welcomed him because he could fight. He did not change the nature and purpose of the fight. He merely offered us a chance of winning.

It was surely not the near prospect of losing which made men take a more idealistic view of the struggle and assume that it would end in a silent social revolution. The progressive legend, so firmly beloved by people like Mr. Levi, seemed to me to be either comic or sad. The common-sense view was the people were slack and fairly indifferent about the war because they thought it could hardly be lost. Filled with that confidence, silly people asked what "we" had to fight for, and said they would not be led up the garden path again. "We" had nothing to lose, "we" would gain nothing from victory.

That was loose and abstract talk. But, when the Germans broke through and the front collapsed, they talked differently. They knew that they did have something to lose and they took the most violent steps to see they didn't lose it. They put their faith in a man they had been taught to regard as a bloodthirsty warmonger, because they thought that there was a great deal to be said for such a man in times of war and blood. They found that they had something in common with him that they did not have with the most eminent and idealistic German proletarian ; they had a deep, common patriotism.

It was not defiance of a foreign political theory, it was not the brotherhood of class that sent the little ships across the sea to rescue the shocked and silent men upon the beaches of Dunkirk. It was the crisis of national independence and survival. The nation held its breath and prayed for a quiet sea. The thud of the guns on the French coast over against Dover was not merely Nazism coming dreadfully near. It was not Imperialism, or the crushing of Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies. It was not resistance to these things that stirred in the people's blood. It was not the beacon fires of the Fuhrer-principle that burned above Boulogne. It was not the tenets of race-theory that shone in the sun. It was not Nazism that called out the historic response. It was older than Nazism by centuries. It was not even the Germans and their evil leader : it was the Ogre and the French ; it was Parma and the Spaniards.

But the mood passed, and the light of common day returned. Men who had been silenced began to chatter again, and they

chattered much too soon. For, if we had realised our danger long after it was on us, we thought it was safely over long before it was. Our instincts went to sleep again, and people like Mr. Levi were allowed to prattle away.

He was still prattling when my mind returned to him, but he had slightly changed his tune. Knowing Mr. Slattery to be a literary gent, he was trying to draw him out on the subject of foreign correspondents. It was axiomatic to Mr. Levi that the world would be bowling merrily along to the millennium if we had only listened to the correspondents he himself preferred to listen to. They had been right where all the stodgy professional diplomats had been wrong. The diplomats had been wrong because they had ingratiated themselves with the ruling classes, to which they belonged, and had ignored the great heart of the people. But the correspondents had gone much deeper. They had been all things to all the men who frequented the medium-priced hotels which were their embassies and listening posts. It was in such places that they had gathered the essential truths about world affairs which had enabled them to explain exactly why everything had happened, after it had happened. Being wise after the event is not the height and crown of human wisdom, but it may well have seemed a great achievement to Mr. Levi, who couldn't even be that.

Mr. Levi mentioned some of these modern prophets with great respect and affection, and looked at Mr. Slattery, to see if he was prepared to agree. But Mr. Slattery said nothing in particular. There was a quality in his silence which made me suspect that he knew some of these inspired persons, and that suspicion was confirmed when he mentioned that he had written a short story about a foreign correspondent. I said I would very much like to read it, so Mr. Slattery brought the manuscript down from his room and gave it to me. He then went out for a walk.

After I had read it, I gave it to Mr. Levi. He read it with a frowning air. He made no comment, but I knew that he would never again try to draw Mr. Slattery into conversation, or seek to draw consoling support from the mind of this eminently modern man. Here is the story.



## GENERAL BRAZZA

When Jeremy Poyning was sent to cover the *coup d'état* in Slavonia he was highly displeased. He showed this by putting out his lower lip and glaring fiercely at his editor ; but he had only himself to blame. He had made himself the acknowledged expert on Slavonia and had entertained his countless readers in the *Searchlight* by a scathing satire on the Foreign Office Blimps who still called the capital city Grunenburg and pinned their faith to the Austrophil Clique which misgoverned, with British approval. Every Slavonian hated the name Grunenburg, with its Austrian associations, and every schoolboy knew that the real, traditional and official name was Grzów. But the Foreign Office didn't know.

Writing from Grzów, on his last visit, he had described the political set-up in Slavonia in terms of a formula which served him equally well in any country he visited, like a traveller's cheque. A group of feudal, Germanised landlords, an obsolete Army caste and a handful of financiers with international connections were misruling the country, in defiance of the people's will. Naturally, the Old Etonians of the British legation had no inkling of the truth. They hunted with the Clique and shared their boxes at the Opera, and thought that all was well. They were blandly unaware of the progressive and national forces whose day would surely and rapidly come. He had ended his article by praising the food in certain restaurants and complaining strongly about the cigarettes.

He had thus established himself as the only man in Britain who really knew about Slavonia, and it was therefore not surprising, though deeply irritating, when he was told to go out again to explain the new situation.

"It's about this man Brazza," said the Editor. "The People's General."

"Oh, yes," said Poyning, "Brazza."

"Well, he's taken power," the Editor pursued. "He seems to be the right stuff, and, anyway, the Clique are out on their necks. You said it would happen, and it has. So you'd better go out at once and give us the low-down."

"What!" Poyning cried sharply. "Out there? Again!"

"It's your show," said the Editor soothingly. "You must

suffer the penalty of success. We'll bill you as 'The Man Who Was Right,' and, anyway, it won't be for long."

But Poyning was unsoothed.

"I suppose that means Newton gets Portugal," he said bitterly.

"Oh, Portugal," said the Editor vaguely, "I hadn't thought of it. Anyway, Slavonia is your pigeon. Home, James, and don't spare the expenses!"

He slapped Poyning on the back and almost pushed him from the room. But his flattery and joviality were unavailing, for Poyning's mind was filled with dark and dire thoughts. Of course this meant that Newton got Portugal, and nobody knew it better than the old twister himself. Maybe Newton had arranged the whole racket. Newton would do you dirty behind your back and fawn all over you to your face. Anything might happen while Poyning was away in that one-horse dump. There might even be a reorganisation in the office. At the very thought Poyning turned pale.

"Gosh, I'm like the Clique myself," he muttered. "I'm chucked out on my neck."

All the way to Slavonia, he thought of subtle and devious ways of getting his own back on Newton.

He cheered up a little when the slow and dirty train breasted the last of the hills and came in sight of Grzó in its thickly-wooded valley. Grzó was a very picturesque town, and it looked well in the sunshine of the late afternoon. There was a touch of Moslem in the architecture, a touch of Habsburg, and a lot of the native bright paint and curlicues. The station was as shoddily splendid, and the big square in front of the Smydly Palace was as dull as ever, but it was a satisfaction to see that the great equestrian statue of General Katjenjammer had been blown up; the bits were still lying about. Poyning passed the Americanised Regina Hotel with scorn and went to a characteristic peasant wine-shop, where he bought himself a Pernod. Then he went back to the Regina and booked a room. After a satisfactory meal, he sent a confidential wire to a friend at home, asking what Newton was doing and also asking if he had really been flagged as "The Man Who Was Right," and, if so, in what type. He then had a bath, another Pernod, and went to bed.

Next morning he visited the Press Bureau. There were bullet

marks on the outside walls, but inside everything was calm. He was received by the elegant Stepani, which was a surprise, for Stepani had managed the hand-outs for the Clique, and Poyning had always thought he was one of them. But Stepani was a changed man, though changed in the opposite way from the Bureau. He was the same outside, but all fermenting within. It was odd to hear democratic sentiments pouring with enthusiasm from the lips of a man who was so exquisitely dressed and who had been to the most impossible school in Vienna ; but he certainly put it across.

"Brazza is the man," he said with electric emphasis. "He is the man we have waited for for a thousand years."

That was a good beginning, enthusiasm with no flunkeyism. He called him plain Brazza. Of course, any title would have been an insult, in view of the story he had to tell.

Wladlwo Brazza was a typical peasant, a product of the mountains. His father, a patriotic blacksmith, had been burned to death by the Austrians, with red-hot horse-shoes. The son had seen this horror, and though he was only a child then, he had taken the sacred oath of the mountain folk, the oath of implacable revenge. He was called up for the Austrian Army in the first Great War and deserted with great promptitude and speed. For many years afterwards his life was wrapped in mystery, but he had fought for his native land in many places, in China, Morocco, Mexico, Spain, Paraguay and the Druse country. He had been wounded in the Gran Chaco, arrested in Marseilles and expelled from Finland by Mannerheim. What part he had played in the local Resistance during the Second Great War was not quite so clearly established, partly because he would never talk about himself, and partly because a sudden popular legend had dazzled the facts. A thousand exploits were fathered on him, and he had every quality to endear him to the people ; he became the personification of the oppressed.

His strength and hardihood were incredible, and no less so his daring and brilliant leadership ; but he was no mere fighting machine. He had the gift of the startling and memorable phrase, and a rich fund of the racy native humour. With all, he had the gift of a broad and warm humanity and utter kinship with his people. There were songs sung about him by the

laughing girls of the valley, no less than by the gaunt shepherds and guerrillas of the hills, and his legendary exploits were by no means all military.

"He is a complete national figure," Stepani explained. "A kind of Slavonian Til Eulenspiegel."

"Spell it," said Poyning crisply.

Stepani spelt it, and explained.

"What happened after the war?" Poyning asked.

Stepani shrugged his shoulders. That was the most depressing part of the story. Everybody knew, of course, that a so-called Government of Liberation had come to power, pretending to speak for The People. But it wasn't long before Slavonians saw the face of the Clique behind the democratic mask. There was a period of acquiescence, disillusionment and apathy, and Brazza disappeared from the scene. Some said he was dead and others that he had left the country, while the Clique spread the shameful tale that he had been bought. He never spoke of this time, but it was safe to surmise that he went to earth, which he could easily do, for there was not a humble home in town or country where he would not have been immediately known and guarded with life itself. Wherever he was, the hearts of the people sank, not hearing of him; but Brazza was a man who had all the patience of the soil and the still more terrible patience of an ancient endurance of tyranny; he bided his time.

His return was dramatic. He chose night-time and his native village to declare himself. He was found in his father's old smiddy, hammering at a horse-shoe on the anvil. When the villagers had all gathered before the door, he came out, holding the glowing horse-shoe aloft, so that the red light fell on his face, and shouted, "This for the Austrian."

"For the who?" asked Poyning.

"The Austrian," Stepani repeated. "The Clique, of course."

"The Clique," Poyning muttered, scribbling busily. "Of course."

That was the beginning of a sudden and irresistible surge. The common people lifted their hero on their hands, and the Clique melted away, with all that they had stood for.

"To show the change," said Stepani. "Only to-day Brazza has signed a decree that the Smydly is to be known in future as the People's Palace."

"That's the spirit," said Poyning approvingly. "These things count. Now, what about an interview with Brazza?"

Stepani was doubtful. He was more than doubtful. Indeed, he appeared to be surprised at the question. With a whole nation to remould and restore, Brazza had more than enough to do. Stepani, of course, understood the importance of the International Press and its power to assist in the remoulding and restoration; but Brazza was a modest man and a peasant, and he still had things to learn. But he would change, he would learn; Stepani would see to that. Let Poyning bide his time and he would see the leader face to face.

Poyning ate a carefully selected lunch with much satisfaction. He had got a gripping story, a number of photos and the promise of an interview. That was good enough for one day. He was so filled with the racy spirit of the country that he decided to risk a glass of *Harscha*, the abominable native brandy. After one gulp he put his glass down with a sick shudder and went back to the Regina to send off his dispatch.

The thing was ready-made, except for Til Eulenspiegel. Would it be a wise move to incorporate him and then send a later wire, as if by afterthought, advising the Editor to consult Newton for an explanation? That would be sucks to Newton, if he didn't know, and of course he wouldn't. Still, you never could tell. After all, the bastard must know something. No, Til Eulenspiegel could wait for his book—"Slavonia on the March."

Two days later, Poyning got his first glimpse of the leader. It was rather a distant view, for Poyning was standing on a café table watching Brazza across the great square, addressing a demonstration from the balcony of the Smydly; but it was plain to be seen that Brazza was a typical son of the Slavonian soil. He had the characteristic box-like skull, the flat nose and hard mouth of the peasantry, and his chest and shoulders, imposing even at a distance, supported the legends of his hardihood and strength, resolution and energy. No wonder the Clique had just melted away.

The General commanded silence with one massive gesture and addressed his people. He spoke for a considerable time in a strong, flat voice. There was authority and strength and even menace in the voice, but none of the humour or of the picturesque

phrasing which had endeared him to his people. So much Poyning gathered from the attitude of the crowd, which listened, for the most part, in silence. Now and again, a harsh voice would call out "Brazza" and the cry would be taken up, first by a few, then by the whole crowd, till it filled the square with a sombre and rather frightening roar. Towards the end of the speech, the light began to fade from the sky and torches began to glow and flare in the gathering darkness. In this light little groups of upturned faces looked red and angry; it was the red glow that had spelt doom for the Austrian. When Brazza had finished, a young man climbed on the broken pedestal of the shattered statue and called out some war cry in a strained and piercing voice. The crowd took it up, and followed it with the People's Anthem, a tune both sad and stirring, like the tramp of marching men. Brazza waved his arm and disappeared. Poyning watched the crowd pour out of the square, set-faced and silent, the stubborn, unconquerable, taciturn men of the high hills and the bitter, snow-driven valleys. The occasion was not exhilarating, but it was deeply moving. It was "The Mood of the Anvil," Poyning thought, a grim and dangerous, but salutary mood.

He called next day for a translation of the speech, but Stepani put him off; he looked worried and jumpy. "It was just local stuff," he said. "Nothing in it for you. But wait for Liberation Day. You'll get something then that'll burn the wires." But he hadn't approached Brazza about the interview. That would have to wait till Liberation Day, too, and Liberation Day was more than a week ahead—a long time to stay in Slavonia.

That night, Poyning went out to do some exploring through the town. That was faintly more risky than it sounds, for Grzō is not like a Western town which compromises into villas before it meets the countryside. It ends in a scatter of narrow streets, with wooden houses, which plunge right into the dark forest. On the northern fringe, you can stand at the door of a tumble-down wineship and look into the depths of the wood, where wolves are still to be feared. You could go through those woods for a hundred and fifty miles without coming upon a trace of Western civilisation. Poyning turned away from the view and entered the wineshop.

It was a picturesque place, with big barrels, rough benches

and tables, and one hanging lamp. The air was filled with the sweet and thrilling scent of burning wood from a fire that glowed fitfully on a low hearth in a corner.

There were four workers with blackened faces who sat in semi-darkness and silence, playing some mysterious game of cards, and a tall and bony woodcutter stood talking sleepily to the patron, a huge and very fat, stupid-looking man. Poyning had a look at the meagre row of bottles. There was *Harscha*, of course, but the very sight of it filled him with residuary convulsions. There was also the dreadful local wine and a great barrel of the tasteless local beer. He pointed smilingly to a thin bottle of a colourless stuff that looked like gin, and was given a glass. It was gin, or something like gin, so he took another glass and carried it to a table. Nobody spoke to him or even looked at him but that was the Slavonian way ; he stretched his legs in comfort and lit a cigarette. He thought with pleasure of the interview he had had that morning with the boys at the British Legation. They hadn't welcomed him particularly, which was no wonder, but they were not welcoming Brazza either. They actually hinted that he wouldn't last, because he stood for nobody. How like the boys ! Of course, Brazza stood for nobody that they knew, or would consent to know. (Imagine them in a place like this ! They wouldn't be found dead in a worker's inn.) He had thought of telling them that Brazza did happen to stand for somebody ; he stood for the People. But it would have been no use. They just couldn't understand.

A muffled thud of someone stumbling against the door disturbed his pleasant reflections and then the door opened, and an officer came in walking with a slow stagger. He was wearing the long grey coat and high forage cap of the National Army, and the red collar tabs of high rank. At first Poyning thought he was drunk till he noticed a darker and spreading red on the front of his coat ; he was wounded, and mortally. He came forward, very slowly, leaning his hand against the wall and breathing deep and dreadful gasps. He sank down on a bench with a low groan and slumped forward. His forage cap fell to the floor.

The fat patron said something in a high voice of terror and began to pull at the dying man with trembling hands. The woodcutter assisted him and, together, they got him straightened

on the bench, shoving an old coat behind his head. "Send for the doctor," was Poyning's first Western impulse, but it was very clear that the patron's anxiety was to get him out at once, to die somewhere else. The workers had stopped their play, and sat, holding their cards stiffly, like four carved figures. Blood dripped on the floor. The officer gave another groan and appeared to die. The lamp swinging in the draught from the open door cast light and shade like a censer. Huge goutts of sweat gathered on the patron's gross neck, and his lips trembled in a gabble of prayer or imprecation, or both. The woodcutter bent over the body and stared.

He stared for a long time. Then he looked round, till his eye, filled with a huge question and wonder, rested on Poyning. Poyning went over and stared with him. Slowly there grew within him a thought, then a conviction that he was seeing General Brazza face to face.

"Brazza," whispered the woodcutter, half question, half affirmation. Poyning nodded. It was, it must be.

At the whispering of the name, one of the players crossed himself and spat on the floor. Then he made a secret gesture with his thumb and all four rose and made their way quickly and silently out by a back door. The patron sat down on a stool and sobbed in great choking heaves of panic. The flames of the fire flickered and almost died, but the woodcutter's lips in the darkness were seen to move in some impersonal prayer.

The intolerable stillness was broken by a rush of cars on the road outside, the slamming of doors, quick, harsh words of command and the soldierly tramp of feet. Six huge soldiers came marching in, and after them came an officer in greatcoat and forage cap, with the red tabs of high rank, no less impressive in physique than the soldiers, and with the flat nose and box-like skull of the peasant. It was General Brazza. Behind him came Stepani, still elegant, but with his face the colour of stale milk.

Poyning watched, like something in a dream, while the soldiers lifted the body from the bench and laid it under the lamp. The officer stared down at the corpse with a hard, inscrutable face. The resemblance between them was not intimate, but it was very striking. It was less the resemblance of two men to each other than the resemblance of two men to one photograph.

On the face of the dead man there was only death, but on the



face of the living there was pride, power, ruthless decision and indomitable will. Poyning was not a brave man, but he had seen much of bloodshed from a motor car and had always favoured a stern realism and a hard use of force for the good cause. But this man was not Power granting an interview. He was Power in action, and his presence filled the room, choking back the breath. The innkeeper felt it. He had been crouching on his stool, peering abjectly through his fingers, but he rose shakily and stood trembling before his master. Poyning almost was too sick to stand. He was weak and suffocated ; he had smelt the tiger's breath.

But the general's eye rested on the woodcutter, who was wary but calm. He asked a short question and the woodcutter replied in stumbling, puzzled words, pointing now to the dead man and now to the living. In his turn, he asked a question, with the word " Brazza " in it. There was a tightening of the skin round the General's eyes and he swung his right arm, smashing his hard fist against the woodcutter's mouth. The man's head jerked back and then forward. It stayed bent while a trickle of blood ran down his chin. There was something noble in his resignation and humility. He made no protest, attempted no excuses, betrayed no surprise. He had waited a thousand years for this.

But the innkeeper broke into an incoherent gabble, wringing his hands and bowing with grotesque clumsiness. In the middle of this the General made a quick and secret sign with his finger in Poyning's direction, and Stepani stepped forward, fawning, with a whispered explanation for his ear. The General nodded and signed again. Two soldiers pushed the woodcutter and patron out through the back door. They returned and carried out the body, lifting it indifferently ; one of them kicked the forage cap out of his way.

For a second the General stood, perfectly calm, but lost in thought. Then he muttered an order to Stepani and turned to go. But, as he turned, his eye met Poyning's for the first time, and his arm moved up in a narrow arc, as he gave him a brief salute. Then he was gone.

Stepani and Poyning were left alone. The elegant Slavonian poured out two great glasses of the burning brandy and presented one to his friend.

"We need this," he said, through dry lips.

But Poyning was swiftly soaring from fear to exultation. He had been saluted. In that enigmatic scene of murder, the power of the sword had recognised the power of the Press. It was the highest moment of his life. He tossed his brandy over and poured out more. A kind of exhilarated arrogance began to seize him.

"Sit down," he said to Stepani. Stepani sat down. "I've had my interview with Brazza, and it's the biggest story of my life. But there's only one thing missing and you can supply it."

"What's that?" asked Stepani weakly, his eyes searching the floor.

Poyning laughed sardonically.

"Less of it," he said, pointing magisterially. "You know damn well what I mean. Which of these men was Brazza?"

"For God's sake, what are you talking about?" asked Stepani, looking with agony towards the door. "The dead man was a poor lunatic, a man with delusions." He drank and seized the bottle, and drank again. "You can't possibly imagine that *he* was Brazza."

"I don't want to imagine," Poyning replied with growing authority. "I want to know and I mean to know. *Which was Brazza?* I don't care what row I make, or what danger you're in, you won't get out of here till you tell me."

Stepani raised his white face and stared in supplication.

"In God's name," he whispered, "I don't know. I don't know. Will you let me go?"

"You don't know," Poyning repeated in astonishment and disgust. "You don't know!" It was incredible, it was maddening; but it was evidently true. He sat down and lifted his glass in a hand that shook with rage, drink, and the aftermath of fear.

"God!" he cried in bitterness. "Here am I with the Greatest Story of my life—of anybody's life. And I don't know what the story is."

## Chapter Six

### SHEPHERD WATCHING SHEEP

**W**E have had a most interesting addition to our little company. Mr. Gudgeon, Willie's teacher, has come to stay with us for a time. Willie is naturally appalled by having his teacher living under the same roof and sitting at the same board, and he won't draw a serene breath so long as Mr. Gudgeon is here ; but, for myself, I trust he stays for a long time.

For Mr. Gudgeon is a man you notice. He is a man of large body and large ideas. He is by no means contented with the important and honourable but necessarily limited field of activity which is allowed to be the teacher's stamping ground, but looks on the whole world as a preparatory school, which must be taught the rudiments of rational living by experts like himself. He remembers the great days of the Renaissance when Colet's teaching made history, and he is well aware that the study of Greek led to the discovery of America and the principle of the pendulum, the exposure of the False Decretals and a general enlightenment, which tempted the intellectuals to smile at the absurd pretensions of all organised religions ; a smile which, in a century or two, grew more widespread and broke into an open laugh, and has now become a hearty and almost unanimous guffaw.

Mr. Gudgeon thinks that some other subject, properly taught, would have an equal effect to-day. He is not quite sure what the subject is, what thing will have the atomic energy of Renaissance Greek, but he inclines to think that the thing is everything. Everything may seem a tall order for the humble student, but this is the age of dehydration. A deal of knowledge can be reduced to a very few pages if you don't insist on having your knowledge fresh.

So, Mr. Gudgeon is an enthusiast for a neat little series of booklets called "The Toiler's University." Each volume covers a large field of human knowledge in just over a hundred small pages. According to the prospectus, all the booklets are written by "acknowledged experts," which may account for the vigorously confident tone, and the wide range of the generalisa-

tions. The study of comparative religion was written by a professional atheist, and the study of warfare by a professional pacifist. I understood that Mr. Gudgeon was anxious to write the volume on education, but he was supplanted, or prevented, by an even more widely acknowledged expert who had taken a degree in Pedagogy and had escaped from his first and only teaching job by climbing out of a window with his pupils in hot pursuit. By way of compensation, Mr. Gudgeon was asked to write the history of Sport. Mr. Gudgeon plays golf.

He was not satisfied by that minor effort, and is now writing a treatise on Women, which he takes very seriously. Not contented with looking up "Women" and "Feminism" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, he will also look up "Seraglio," "Prostitution," "Sweating," "Sex," and, of course, "Marx." After that, he will call to mind all the plays and novels he has ever read, and let his fancy freely roam. I was sure it would be a pleasure to meet this man. It was.

There is a lot of Mr. Gudgeon. His face is broad and heavy, and his movements and speech are slow. He is not altogether fat, but he is big, broad and bulky. His eyes are slightly protuberant and of a glassy grey colour; the eyelids incline to droop over them. He wears hairy brown tweeds, with a grey woollen shirt and a bright red tie. This outfit goes very well with his short, rather sparse and fluffy ginger hair to create an appearance that is slightly Bohemian and yet not altogether unprofessional.

Mrs. Beveridge introduced this large man with her customary enthusiasm, and tried hard to make him feel at home. But her efforts were unnecessary. Mr. Gudgeon is a citizen of the world. He is equally in place (or out of it) in the hut of the peasant and the palace of the most opulent member of the bourgeoisie. His handshake with Mr. Chatterjee was more than a greeting. It was an assurance that he regarded the Indian as an ideological brother, and he plainly expected Mr. Chatterjee to be much comforted and encouraged. He was ever so slightly condescending to Mr. Baldero, who is only a business man, and he was warily hostile towards myself. Mr. Slattery he accepted on probation, and Mr. Levi he already knew.

Mrs. Beveridge was worried by the possibility of acrimony in argument, and she brought education into her social chat, partly

in compliment to her new guest and partly because she imagined that the subject was uncontroversial.

She said brightly : " I suppose you'll be longing for the day when the new Education Act, or whatever it is, comes into operation. It will give you such opportunities, won't it ? "

Mr. Gudgeon broke bread over his soup and smiled in a slow and superior fashion.

" I'll believe in the new Act when I see it working," he said. " But I'm afraid I'm not optimistic enough to expect any serious reform from the present gang in power."

" I should think not," Mr. Levi echoed.

" But surely everybody says the new Act is a great advance," Mrs. Beveridge protested.

Mr. Gudgeon smiled again.

" My dear lady," he said, " I teach my pupils to ask themselves what they mean, or think they mean, when they say ' Everybody says.' Almost invariably they mean, ' The newspapers say.' In fact, the new Act is an attempt to buttress reaction, while handing a sop to the people. Every evil, every injustice of our system is to be perpetuated and perhaps enlarged."

" I quite agree," said Mr. Levi.

" So do I," I said.

The two progressives looked surprised and suspicious. Mr. Gudgeon asked with rather obvious doubt if I objected to privilege in education, and if I thought the Act accentuated privilege.

" There can be no doubt about it," I answered. " It puts the teacher in a privileged position which I would most certainly resent, if I were a parent. An atheistic teacher enjoys a guarantee that his position and promotion will not be affected in any way by his anti-religious views."

" And why should it be ? " Mr. Gudgeon demanded. " Is a teacher not as free as any other man to form his own views on religion ? How can you possibly call that privilege ? "

" I don't call *that* privilege," I answered. " A man, as a citizen, may adopt what views he chooses, but if he demands the right to teach children and refuses to be answerable for what he teaches, he is certainly claiming privilege. His claim is parallel to the claim of a doctor who refuses to practise vaccination or inoculation, but says that no awkward questions must be asked

when he applies for the position of M.O.H. in some port town. It is privilege, and insolent privilege, at that." Mr. Gudgeon looked annoyed, and Mrs. Beveridge apprehensive. "Don't imagine that I am accusing the atheist teacher of deliberate insolence," I went on. "He simply has no idea at all of the meaning of religion and no notion of its importance to other people."

"Your parallel is a mere travesty," said Mr. Gudgeon haughtily. "Every teacher is answerable for what he teaches. He must be qualified in the subjects he professes. If he is not a Grecian, he doesn't teach Greek. If he is not religious, he does not teach religion—or, at least, he need not, under the new Act."

"But the doctor who is not a vaccinationist, simply does not vaccinate," I pointed out. "Nevertheless, the people who believe that vaccination is indispensable for the safety of the general health are not at all satisfied with such an attitude of broad-minded inactivity. You may say that anybody who wants it can go to another doctor for vaccination, but the ignorant will be much influenced by the fact that the man in authority does not believe in it, and they won't go. Children are among the ignorant, and will be influenced in the same way by the man in authority. Anyway, religion is not a subject like Greek. A man can live a full and useful life without any Greek, and nobody pretends otherwise. But there are many parents who believe that a man cannot live a good life without religion."

"Also, I am told that modern educationists insist that the inculcation of a general approach to life is much more important than any subject. Again, I am told that the new schools and the new scheme are intended to teach this approach to life, to implant a code of moral and social behaviour. That is their primary purpose. Therefore, the teacher's own approach to life is of primary importance."

"In a sense," said Mr. Gudgeon, "that is so."

"In what sense is it not so?" I asked him.

Mr. Gudgeon closed his eyes and thought.

"In this sense," he said at length. "No teacher will attack a child's religion. He will be free to practise any religion he chooses—or his parents choose. But, equally, no teacher will tolerate an inquisition into his own views. He will demand his democratic rights."

Mr. Gudgeon was another of them. He thought he had answered my question by talking very firmly about something else. Mr. Levi thought so, too.

"Does he claim the right to impart his view of life to the children?" I asked. "And how can he avoid doing so? More and more, the teacher is regarded as the saviour and inspirer of an uninspired and uninspiring society. He points out the Way, the Truth and the Life, but what Way he will point out, what Truth he will teach and what Life he will commend, he chooses to regard as his own private business. A teacher's claim to unquestioned liberty in forming the minds and characters of other people's children seems to me the height of arrogance."

"It seems to me the height of arrogance that parents should demand that teachers should teach and pretend to believe their own religious notions," said Mr. Gudgeon with some warmth.

"Hear! Hear!" said Mr. Levi again. He thought Mr. Gudgeon was doing uncommonly well.

"No parents demand that," I explained patiently. "There is no indication that parents demand their children to be kept longer at school, whatever the teaching, and seriously religious parents are most anxious that their children should *not* be taught by teachers who merely pretend to believe. The notion that parents are clamouring to have their children kept at school is fairy stuff. The professional interests are insisting on the children remaining and then insisting also that their minds be formed by people who are answerable for their ethical and moral principles only to themselves. A religious parent wishes his child to look on his teacher as a moral guide. He also wishes him to understand that the prime moral duty is to worship God. But the child finds that his moral guide rejects this moral duty. Even if all secularist teachers were scrupulously careful to say nothing to undermine religious faith, they would still be undermining it by saying nothing. I don't think there would be much room in Russia for a teacher who silently but pointedly dissociated himself from the worship of Stalin."

"What do you mean by the worship of Stalin?" asked Mr. Levi truculently.

"I mean the worship of Stalin," I answered.

"Let us not quibble about words," said Mr. Gudgeon magisterially. "I contend that there is no room for denominational

schools, even on religious grounds. Have you read 'Education for a New Society,' by Ernest Green, of the W.E.A.?"

"I haven't," said Mr. Slattery unexpectedly. "But surely the title puts you straight out of court. If you are educating for a new society, you are overtly seeking to train the young mind in one direction, introducing it to one set of moral principles and values. If you are the Pied Piper leading the children away, surely the parents have the right to ask where you are leading them?"

"The moral principles, the ethics we propose to teach, are no secret," answered Mr. Gudgeon. "They are summed up in one word—Democracy. I fancy there are few parents who would object to *that*."

Mr. Levi fancied the same.

"There are many parents who would object to Mr. Green's conception of Democracy," I said. "They would say that his special pleading for Soviet totalitarian education betrays his weak hold on the principles he professes. But, apart from that, Mr. Green (whose book greatly interested me) says that Democracy is so important that we cannot afford to have a merely negative teaching. We must have positive Democrats in our schools. Now, there are parents who think that Christianity is quite as important as Democracy, and they know what they mean by Christianity much more clearly than Mr. Green knows what he means by Democracy. They want their children to be taught by positive Christians. They claim that as a right. On what grounds do you deny it?"

"We are straying from the point," said Mr. Gudgeon. "I don't know what you mean by a positive Christianity, but I fail to see what is Christian in teaching narrow formulæ in a slum school. Green says this: 'To anyone able to look beyond the limits of a particular religious formula—and there are to-day many such—it must seem that to impart a knowledge of the Scriptures in the atmosphere of a well-conducted, healthy, adventurous modern school would have in it more of the spirit of Christianity than the dogged insistence on the right to teach a catechism in a barn.' I have quoted that passage to many Christians and asked them what they have got to say about it. I haven't had an answer yet."

He sat back in his chair with the air of Jesting Pilate offering polite attention to a reply that would not come.



"It's a pity you couldn't put that eloquent poser to Christ," I suggested. "After all, there were well-conducted, healthy and perhaps adventurous synagogues at his disposal, where knowledge of the Scriptures was much esteemed ; but He chose to teach a catechism in a barn. He insisted on a formula."

"What formulæ did He teach ?" asked Mr. Levi.

"Very intolerant formulæ," I answered. "For example, He taught that Mr. Gudgeon was His enemy ; 'He that is not with Me is against Me.' He would have said that Mr. Gudgeon would have to die and be born again before he was fit to learn, much less to teach."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Levi.

"You may call it nonsense," I replied. "But you would do well to remember that what you are calling nonsense is Christian teaching ; I don't think the secularist teacher will always remember."

Mr. Baldero didn't like this. A man of extreme exactitude and hard realism in business affairs, he favours the vague, the woolly and the almost meaningless in religious discussion. He is acute and accurate in what he understands, but not in anything else.

"I think that's hardly fair," he protested. "After all, you can't tie a teacher down to a lot of narrow doctrines, but surely there's a general basis of agreement about Christianity. I mean, we all know about the Golden Rule and Our Heavenly Father and that kind of thing, and I think it's pretty narrow-minded to insist on any details. Anyway, you've no right to."

I sighed, for I might not have spoken at all ; but Mr. Gudgeon was pleased.

"I imagine that that's the general point of view," he said, in triumph. "I don't think the parents you're so worried about are very worried themselves. They know that secularist teachers won't make nonsense of the Christian ethic, though they may have rejected anthropomorphic accretions, among which I'm afraid Mr. Baldero's Heavenly Father will be included for most of us."

He beamed in an amiable and reassuring way, to show that no offence was meant ; but some was taken. Mr. Baldero was disturbed.

"That means you're an atheist," he said.

"Hmm !" said Mr. Gudgeon thoughtfully. "That's rather

a crude statement of my position. An atheist flatly denies the existence of God. I don't. I think the hypothesis is highly improbable, so unlikely as—well, not to be worth bothering about. There are more serious and more pressing matters in the world."

"The world is so full of a number of things," suggested Mr. Slattery. "We can all be happy without Our Heavenly Hypothesis."

"More or less," Mr. Gudgeon agreed.

"That means you *are* an atheist," Mr. Levi put in. "For practical purposes."

Mr. Gudgeon smiled kindly, as became a stalwart of the Toiler's University.

"That's rather a loose way of putting it," he said, "but it will do."

"But I thought you taught religion in school," said Mrs. Beveridge in pure innocence. "I'm sure I've heard that from Willie."

"I take Bible and I conduct prayers," Mr. Gudgeon conceded rather grudgingly. He was not very happy about this admission, but the glance of his eye showed that it was not the presence of Christians but of an atheist that discomfited him. "You see, this Act, with its safeguards, is not yet in operation. Indeed, I am doubtful if the safeguards will ever be effective, so long as local busybodies have control of the schools. Religious people can be very unscrupulous, you know, when they are trying to force their views on others. It isn't only Jesuits who say that the end justifies the means."

The silence that followed was impressive. It hung in the air like sudden and shocking news of death. This was the ethical gent, the guardian of non-anthropomorphic Christianity. Mr. Levi was the only one who took the announcement placidly, and even he was aware that all around him was a stunned wonder and a throng of wild surmises. But Mr. Gudgeon suspected nothing more than a slight hesitancy about accepting the round and ringing finality of his logic ; so he offered us a happy parallel, illustration or analogy.

"It's really the same as Empire Day, the national anthem, saluting the flag and all that kind of thing," he explained. "These forms of totem-worship make no appeal to me, but they

aren't important and there is a certain popular feeling in their favour, so I conform, without prejudice to my private views."

"There's no point of principle involved," said Mr. Levi encouragingly.

After that, the silence might fairly be called holy. Mr. Chatterjee looked at the neo-Christian patriot as he might stare at some strange beast newly risen from the sea. Mrs. Beveridge was biting her lip in genuine distress, and Mr. Baldero was wishing he had kept his mouth shut. I polished my pince-nez and wondered if Mr. Levi could possibly be like that all through. It was Mr. Slattery who first woke to social activity.

"Tell me," he said. "Do you teach Lycidas in school?"

Mr. Gudgeon admitted that he did, though with some surprise at the irrelevance. Mr. Slattery began to speak, very slowly and very beautifully :

Blind mouths that scarce themselves know how to hold  
A sheephook or have learned aught else the least  
That to the faithful herdsman's art belongs.  
What recks it them? What heed they? They are sped,  
And, when they list, their lean and flashy songs  
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw.  
The hungry sheep look up and are not fed.  
But swoln with wind and the rank mist they draw  
Rot inwardly and foul contagion spread.

Mr. Gudgeon was still surprised at the irrelevance, but Mr. Levi was interested.

"That's Milton, isn't it?" he asked. "Not bad. He had the right idea about kings."

"He had the right idea about intolerance," Mr. Gudgeon added, coming back into his stride. "New presbyter, he said, is but old priest writ large. I consider his *Areopagitica* one of the noblest expressions of the human spirit (and, of course, he favoured divorce). He demolished the case for censorship and the compulsion of conscience. I wonder what he would think if he were alive and here to-day."

He sat back with an air of complacent and agreeable contemplation. He was wondering, quite simply, quite sincerely, quite happily wondering what Milton would say if he were alive and here to-day.

## Chapter Seven

### THE GATES OF THE FUTURE

SOMETHING in the news had depressed Mrs. Beveridge, some surprising and violent turn and disappointment.

"I sometimes wonder if life is worth living," she said with a sigh. "Ever since the fall of France I've had no faith in the future. I mean, I don't think things will ever be the same."

"If you'll excuse me, my dear lady," said Mr. Gudgeon, with a patronising smile, "that statement is hardly logical. If you think things will never be the same again, you are quite right, but you have not lost your faith in the future. You have lost your faith in the past."

"I've lost it, anyway," said Mrs. Beveridge. "I don't care what it is, but I wish I had it back."

"You never will," Mr. Gudgeon assured her. "Things will never be the same again; you may be sure of that. France will never again fall under the sway of the old rotten gang which brought her down. The Cagoulards, the Comité des Forges, the Two Hundred Families, the time-serving Radicals, the treacherous Socialists, the Jesuit clique, the reactionary Army caste, the peasant mentality, the capitalist exploiters, have all had their day. A sorry mess they made of things, but they won't do it again. The Marseillaise is again a marching tune."

"But I didn't mean only France," objected Mrs. Beveridge. "I meant things wouldn't be the same here, either."

"Allowed," Mr. Gudgeon conceded graciously. "They won't. The changes here will be not less profound, though perhaps more peaceful. I dare say heads will not roll in the sand, as some revolutionary said——"

"Hitler," I put in.

"—but the result will be equally salutary. In fact, the revolution is going on now. It is going on in the one place where revolutions win or fail. It is going on in the minds of men. And, I venture to say, that the greatest victory of all is being won in the schoolroom. Education has flung its banner to the breeze and is storming the barricades of reaction. We are discovering and teaching what education really means, what its point and purpose really are——"

He paused in anticipation of the question which should have leapt, burning, from our lips. But Mr. Levi is not one to help even a friend out, and the rest of us had had more than enough of Mr. Gudgeon's philosophy for the time being. However, Mr. Gudgeon is a teacher, and not easily put out by lack of response.

"What is the purpose of education?" he asked himself with the deepest earnestness. "What is education? Now, you may disagree with this definition, for it may well go against your preconceptions and prejudices; but I would ask you to think it over. Education is the means, the instrument, the dynamic of social equality. Education is the solvent of class and class inequality."

He left us to think it over.

Mr. Levi read rapidly through the latest copy of *Red Writing*, which had just come by post. Mrs. Beveridge rang the bell for Lucy to clear away the table. Mr. Baldero shifted and sighed, and Mr. Chatterjee hummed softly to himself. Mr. Slattery closed his eyes, in thought, or boredom.

"You will say," Mr. Gudgeon went on in a sonorous voice, "You will say that the purpose of education is the acquirement of useful knowledge, but that won't do. Of course, I am not against knowledge, as such." He smiled, as Solomon might have done while admitting that he was not opposed to matrimony. "Knowledge has its uses—but what are its uses? When you speak of useful knowledge, you are really begging the question. You realise that?"

Coal stirred in the fire, the clock ticked, Mr. Baldero breathed deep and slow.

"Begging the question," repeated Mr. Gudgeon after a pause. "Knowledge has a use-value, and an exchange value, and, in some communities, a scarcity and a social value. But it has also a simple, undeterminate value." Mr. Levi brightened at this, for he, too, had read the first chapter of *Capital*, first forwards and then backwards. "Exchange-value is mensurable," Mr. Gudgeon boomed on, "but use-value takes us into deeper waters."

I agreed, for Mr. Gudgeon seemed now to be asking what was the purpose of the purpose of education, and the shores were receding rapidly.

"Is knowledge to be used for personal advancement?" Mr. Gudgeon demanded of us. "That is the answer of a fairly progressive, acquisitive society. We reject it. Is knowledge to be used for the benefit of others? That is the answer of a so-called philanthropic society, and we reject it, too. Is knowledge to be used for ostentation and social advancement? That is the answer of an oligarchical or aristocratic society, and we reject it utterly. No! The real use of knowledge in our changing society is the opportunity to attain knowledge, the opportunity for each child to assert and prove his equality with every other child in the field of knowledge."

The deep waters had closed over our heads. What Mr. Gudgeon meant swayed vaguely before my mind, like some strange plant, half-seen, under the sea. Mr. Levi drew his brows together and puzzled it out.

"It's like votes for women," explained Mr. Gudgeon. "That was a symbol of equality and enfranchisement and opportunity."

"Oh, the vote," said Mrs. Beveridge flatly.

"Yes, the vote," Mr. Gudgeon repeated, with reverence. "That was the rounding of Cape Turk. Now we must tackle Cape Caste. Every child must be conceded his inalienable birthright, and that birthright is an equal opportunity for education for life."

"For life!" Mrs. Beveridge said with displeased surprise. "I thought they were going to get out at eighteen." Mr. Slattery laughed, but Mr. Gudgeon was displeased.

"I mean preparation for life," he repeated. "That is the birthright."

"That is the mess of pottage," said Mr. Slattery. "What is the value of equality of opportunity to a child who can't take advantage of the opportunity?"

"That is Toryism," said Mr. Gudgeon.

"Pure Fascism," said Mr. Levi warmly.

"Admittedly, there is much benefit for those who *can* take advantage," Mr. Slattery went on. "They can advance and indulge themselves in an oligarchical or aristocratical way, or devote themselves to altruistic service. But what's the benefit to the kid who is stupid?"

"*That's* begging the question, if you like," said Mr. Levi. "Who says any kid is stupid? Just because a boy doesn't take

to Latin verbs in an unhealthy classroom, with an overworked teacher using out-of-date methods, you say he is stupid. Blame the system, not the boy."

"I'm not blaming anything or anybody," replied Mr. Slattery. "I'm merely stating a fact."

"But, is it a fact?" Mr. Levi demanded. "You've got to prove it, and you jolly well can't till you've removed all the bad conditions and impediments."

"But surely," I said, "if Mr. Slattery can't prove his case till extraneous conditions are removed, equally you can't prove yours."

"Show me the kids who are stupid when they are doing work adjusted to their minds," Mr. Levi said stubbornly. "When you've got airy classrooms, small classes and up-to-date, specially trained teachers, you won't have stupid children."

"You have these conditions in the special schools for defective children," I told him.

"Oh, defectives!" said Mr. Levi scornfully. "That's a different story altogether."

"It is not," I answered. "Cobbett said that paupers were merely very poor people, and defectives, for the most part, are not children suffering from the effects of physical disease; they are merely very stupid children. If very stupid children do not cease to be very stupid because of small classrooms and the rest of it, why should moderately stupid children cease to be moderately stupid?"

"Wait and see," said Mr. Levi with confidence.

"I should be glad to," I said. "But, unfortunately, you and Mr. Gudgeon won't allow me. I should like to be sure that longer schooling for dull and unwilling pupils would help them before I saw it compulsorily extended. But you are the one who won't wait and see. You haven't got the schools, the equipment or the methods to improve the admittedly bad state of affairs obtaining. You haven't the goodwill of either parents or pupils. But, up the school age must go, diverting the resources which might be used to improve the present defective system—and this on the strength of a mere assertion."

"If it's good for the children of well-to-do parents to stay at school," said Mr. Levi, "then it's good for the children of the common people."

"That," said Mr. Gudgeon, "is equality."

"If it's good enough for the rich, it's good enough for the workers," said Mr. Levi doggedly.

"Which means," I said, "that many children must stay on at school when they want to leave, because a few children stay on at school when they don't want to leave. You call it equality, which it is—of a very fantastic kind. But, is it liberty? One group gets what it wants, and therefore another group must be forced to take what it doesn't want. The opportunity is so dazzling that you must call in the police to enforce it."

"You're very strong on parents' rights," said Mr. Levi. "But what about the rights of the children?"

"The 'rights of the children' means the right of people like yourself to override their parents and compel them to do what they don't want to do," I replied.

"Naturally kids aren't too keen on the kind of educational factories we have at present," Mr. Levi admitted, "but wait till we get our modern schools and modern methods and subjects and teachers."

"I'll be delighted to wait till then," I answered. "Why won't you?"

"Look here," said Mr. Levi aggressively. "Do you believe in equality in education, or do you not?"

"Not," I answered.

Mr. Levi was delighted, for he thought I had played right into his hands, and Mr. Gudgeon nodded wisely, to show that he had known this all along.

"That's honest, anyway," said Mr. Levi, almost approvingly. "You want the most expensive education for the children of the rich, and some kind of a push-over for the children of the poor."

"By no means," I objected. "I want the capable and willing children of the poor to get a much better education than they are getting at present (and unsatisfactory though it is just now, I fear it will be much worse when you are done with your reforms). But all children are not capable or willing, and therefore I don't want the same education for all, for that is an impossibility. I would no more spend the same energy on teaching difficult subjects to a dull and uninterested child as I would spend on a clever and eager child, than I would spend the same musical zeal on a young Mozart and the tone-deaf boy next door."



“Come now,” said Mr. Gudgeon kindly. “Isn’t the fallacy too gross? Musical talent is a thing which you may or may not have. But Levi’s point is that each child has *some* talent which we can develop. Speaking as an educationist, I support that view.”

“Speaking as a teacher, what do you say?” I asked him. “An educationist is merely a specialised politician, but a teacher has the facts under his nose. Do you find in your own school that some children are clever at Latin, others at maths, others at carpentry and others at music? Or, do you find that the best class at the admittedly difficult subjects is the best class all round?”

“I should be surprised if that was true,” said Mr. Slattery. “Surely there are all kinds of aptitudes. Don’t we all know intellectuals who are tone-deaf, or are helpless with their hands?”

“Yes, and they’re no damned good at business,” growled Mr. Baldero. “They’ve got their heads in the clouds most of the time, and they think too much of themselves, anyway.”

“I’ve known people with blind spots,” I admitted, “but are they the rule or the exception? Mr. Gudgeon can tell us. We are speaking from a narrow personal experience, but he has a long and wide experience. Let me put it this way. Suppose you had two hundred newcomers to your school, and academic tests had divided them into good, fair, poor and very bad, at academic subjects. Suppose you gave the four groups singing, woodwork and gymnastics as common subjects, which group would you expect to be much the best?”

“Umm,” said Mr. Gudgeon.

“You would expect the academic group to be best at the non-academic subjects,” I answered for him. “You would *know* they would be the best, as a group. Supposing we were in Russia where children are sorted into educational packets, like seeds, and there was a great need for carpenters. Which group would you choose to study carpentry?”

“I wouldn’t choose a group at all,” Mr. Gudgeon answered triumphantly. “I would make an individual selection.”

“Sure,” said Mr. Levi. “Like Russia.”

“I take that to mean that, if you had to choose a group, you would choose the academic group,” I went on. “You know that in a modern multiple school, offering a wide range of

disciplines, the children who are put in the manual classes are not put there because they are good at manual subjects, but because they are bad at mental subjects. You may say that all subjects are of equal value, but, as a teacher, you know that the boys who can do the hard subjects better than others can do the easy subjects also better than others. I submit that we should spend our best efforts on children who can learn something, when we come to the stage of education, beyond the elementary, where some children can learn little or nothing."

"But you are putting an absurd emphasis on mere cleverness," said Mr. Slattery. "I know men who are mentally slow and are perhaps not very good even at their manual trades, but they are better men, and wiser, too, than most of the highbrows I know."

"Hear ! Hear !" said Mr. Gudgeon.

"Hear ! Hear !" said Mr. Levi.

"Hear ! Hear !" said I. "I admit very gladly that cleverness is not goodness, nor is it wisdom. I only say that cleverness is cleverness, and that cleverness is the quality by which we may profit at school. Much harm will be done if we insist that all children have it in some form, when, in fact, most have it in no form. I think, myself, that the intellectuals are, at the moment, the silliest portion of our community ; but that doesn't alter the fact that the man who understands mathematics will make a better civil engineer than the man who doesn't. The slow, dull boy may have better instincts and character, even a better judgment, than the quick, clever boy, but he remains slow and dull, and, if you treat the two boys as being of equal talent, you won't produce two bright boys, but you will produce two dull boys."

"I can't really accept that," said Mr. Slattery. "The slow, dull boy, as you call him, may have the qualities of a poet or a hero or a saint. He may be a wonderful citizen, husband and father. It's only in a very narrow context that you can talk about 'slow' and 'dull'."

"Agreed, agreed," I cried. "We are repeating ourselves. I admit that we can use these words only in a very narrow context, but that context happens to be school, and it's school we're talking about."

"School as we know it now," said Mr. Gudgeon.

"The only school we know or ever have known," I answered. "When you create the school that will teach dull boys to be saints, heroes and poets, then you may ask for powers to compel your pupils to attend. But you haven't done it yet."

"Why do upper-class boys stay at school, even if they're dull?" asked Mr. Levi. "That's the crux of the matter, and you won't face it. If continued education is good for the so-called upper class, it's good for the workers, too. That's why the upper class oppose reform, for they know damned well that the only chance of keeping the workers on a poor-house level is to keep them ignorant. Liberty! Huh!"

Mr. Levi sneered at Liberty with much venom, and looked at me, with even more.

"If I were advising the ruthless upper class," I said, "and I wanted to keep the workers dumbly contented with a poor-house level, I would make education compulsory till twenty-one. The young men and women would be so glad to escape at that age, that they would regard the most gruesome industrial conditions as a vast improvement on their school life. But the point you raised is very interesting. What you mean is——"

"I don't need you to tell me what I mean," Mr. Levi burst out with anger.

"But you do," I answered, "and, anyway, you have just been telling me what *I* mean, and sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Nothing could be more democratic. You mean that upper-class children enjoy an advantage by staying at school past fourteen, and therefore other children must be compelled, also, to get the same advantage. But the kind of education which is to be forced on the workers is not the kind which the upper classes willingly accept."

"I should hope not," growled Mr. Levi. "But the kind of education that is good enough for the workers is jolly well going to be good enough for the boss-class, too. There won't be real equality till all children have to attend the same school, and the public school racket is finished."

"I am not deeply interested in public schools," I said, "but they exist, and they should therefore be seriously regarded."

"I know how I would regard them," said Mr. Levi.

"We all do," I assured him, "but you don't regard them seriously. Bigotry is always frivolous. I am more interested in

what Mr. Slattery thinks, for Mr. Slattery was at a public school and didn't like it. I know a fair number of old public school boys who agree with Mr. Slattery, and that, I think, is a fair criticism, because the final test of any social organisation is its success or failure in giving a sense of community or brotherhood to its members. Mr. Slattery's school failed with Mr. Slattery."

"Why?" asked Mr. Slattery. "What do you think was the reason?" He seemed to be stirred by uneasy memories.

"I can only guess," I answered, "but I imagine that the chief reason was Youth, self-government for youngsters and all the rest of the clap-trap. From what I hear, the misery that some children suffer in some public schools comes from the overbearing and intolerant mood of their fellows, who are devoted to puerile ideals and have little or no imaginative sympathy. They are sometimes abetted by masters who are no older in the mind than the pupils and who share juvenile bigotries with industrious imitateness. I should fancy that when the lonely and harassed boy finds any friend at all, it is in some middle-aged master, who gives him a degree of protection at the time, and a sense of proportion for the future."

Mr. Slattery kept a silence which seemed to indicate a degree of not very willing consent.

"That's all fine and dandy," said Mr. Levi. "But all you are doing is show that public schools are haunts of vice and misery."

"Not at all," I said. "We have agreed that some pupils are unhappy there. But, I am sure Mr. Slattery will agree, that the great majority are happy."

Mr. Slattery nodded.

"Then," I said, "we have two types of school in Britain. One in which the children are mostly contented and are willing to stay, and one in which the children are mostly discontented and unwilling to stay. If you want all children to be compelled to stay, it would seem wise to find what is the secret of the comparatively popular schools and apply it to the unpopular schools. The special qualities which make public schools popular should be studied, and adopted, if possible. But these are the very qualities which Mr. Levi wants to abolish. By his programme, all children will have to attend the school which none of them want to attend."

"No," protested Mr. Levi. "I would make the Board Schools as attractive as the public schools."

"But how?" I asked him. "You regard the attractive qualities of the public schools with deep dislike. The only large-scale example of a popular school system is the one you want to wipe out. You don't say it is a good system which must be extended to all, but a bad thing which must be denied to all."

"Do you want to extend it?" asked Mr. Levi. "Do you want to see the young workers being corrupted on the playing fields of Eton?"

"I would like to discover the secret of Eton's popularity," I answered, "for I would like more working-class boys and girls to want to stay at school. But I certainly don't want to adopt it holus-bolus, and I don't want to wipe it out merely because not all children enjoy it."

"You are assuming that the public school is attractive because of good qualities," said Mr. Gudgeon, "but I think it is attractive because of bad qualities." Mr. Levi nodded eagerly. "It is attractive because it offers unfair social advantage."

"No doubt it offers very considerable advantage of that kind," I answered. "And that might explain its popularity among parents. But, what about the children?"

"They're just as big snobs as their parents," said Mr. Levi spitefully.

"Harsh words about Youth," I said reprovingly. "But, supposing that to be true, it might explain why the children endured the schooling, not why they enjoyed it. There is something in the system which ordinary children positively like."

"Look here," said Mr. Slattery. "Admitting that Board Schools are not popular and that public schools mostly are, is not the best way to improve the Board School to send there the children of public school parents? Then the parents would see that the schools improve."

"That's the idea," said Mr. Levi enthusiastically. "The overcrowded classes would soon disappear."

"Why not apply that idea to the slums?" I asked. "Send Mr. Levi to live there."

"That's different," said Mr. Levi quickly. I waited till he would explain the difference, but he seemed unaware of the necessity.

"Supposing the children of Colonel Blimp are sent to a Board

School, will you concede him the right to create an unholy fuss if the school displeases him ? ” I asked.

“ Oh, yes,” said Mr. Levi. “ We want him to kick up a fuss, and we will all gain from his selfish concern for his own children. Some people will get a shock if that ever happens.”

“ I imagine you will,” I answered. “ Colonel Blimp might tolerate the lack of cubic feet with more philosophy than you give him credit for, but he might make a real fuss about the social atmosphere of some of the schools.”

“ How ? ” asked Mr. Levi.

“ He might object to the teaching of an anti-British bias,” I answered, “ to the spreading of foreign political doctrines and of social division under a thin disguise. I don’t think he will allow his children to be taught citizenship by a citizen who thinks that citizenship and sedition are one. Colonel Blimp would kick up hell about abuse of trust by certain of Mr. Gudgeon’s colleagues.”

“ Oh, would he ? ” asked Mr. Levi. “ We’ll see about that.”

“ You won’t,” I answered. “ You won’t, because it won’t be possible to send the Blimp children to a poor-class Board School without, at the same time, sending the children of Left Wing educationists, and that they will not do.”

“ All the same,” said Mr. Slattery, “ do you not admit that the segregation of children from the earliest age is undesirable ? I dare say there are problems of dirt and behaviour in some schools, but why should the squire’s son not be sent to the same village school as the ploughman’s son, at least for the earliest years ? ”

“ Ask the squire,” I answered. “ I don’t know why the squire sends his children away from home at a very early age. I, myself, was brought up in a different and, I think, a better educational tradition.”

“ Then why don’t you insist on the squire’s son going to the village school, if you think it’s a good thing ? ” demanded Mr. Gudgeon.

“ Because I’m not the squire,” I answered wearily. “ And the squire’s son is not my son. I don’t know on what ground, except the ground of insolent tyranny, I could claim the right to order the squire to send his son to any school that seemed suitable to me.”

"But you wouldn't mind ordering the children of the poor about," said Mr. Levi.

I looked at him, and wondered was it worth while pointing out to him that I had been arguing all night against the ordering of poor children about, and that he had been arguing for it, that I had no fear of the squire's son being insolently instructed, but a great fear for the poor man's son. But it wasn't worth while. Compulsory education never is.

## Chapter Eight

### COMBINED OPERATIONS

"I WAS reading an awfully good article to-day," said Mrs. Beveridge. "It was all about political arguments for women."

"I wish they had more of them," said Mr. Levi.

"I'm not so sure of that," Mrs. Beveridge answered judicially.

"I don't think argument ever does any good, but it seems we've got to have arguments nowadays, so we may as well get them right. As a matter of fact, that's what the writer says. She says—now where is that article? I thought I had it here. Ah, here it is."

Mrs. Beveridge fumbled with the article, with all the air of a soprano who has brought her music, so I asked her to read it to us.

"Well, if you really want to hear it," she said gratefully. "As a matter of fact, I believe it would do you good. It's called 'The Female Forum' and it's by Arabella Floss, M.P." She read it to us with a steady and rapid intonation, which showed she had studied it, with appreciation, more than once.

#### " 'THE FEMALE FORUM' "

" 'I'm sure all of my readers have heard of the Women for Westminster Movement. But, just to remind you, it is a movement for putting women in Westminster, and a very good movement it is, too. More women in Westminster is not just a good

thing—it is a necessity. We women know only too well what a fine mess the lordly male has made of things during all the centuries when women were thought to be fit for nothing better than having babies! Not that I'm against having babies, of course. That would sound rather strange, coming from a mother of two, wouldn't it?

“ ‘As a matter of fact, I am all for babies in their proper place. Only this morning, I popped in to see The Youngest—little Cyprian Joe, twenty-three months of mischief. I should have been rushing off to the Committee on Telegraph Reform, but as I bent over his cot, something just gave inside me, and I said, “Here you are, Arabella Floss, M.P., just another baby-kissing politician. You'll be late for that Committee again.”’

“ ‘All the same, it was Cyprian Joe who put the idea for this series into my head. This is the idea he gave me. Not every woman can be a Westminster M.P., but they can all be a far prouder kind of M.P.—Maternal Parent. And they can see that Parliament runs the world the way *they* want it run. Women for Westminster is all right, but Westminster for Women is much better!

“ ‘Let all you mothers, and, of course, all you Women of Careers, tell Parliament what you want done. Parliament will do what you command, don't be afraid on that score. This is a Democracy, thank goodness. But you really must tell Parliament what you want before Parliament can do it, mustn't you? I mean, if women are going to go right into public life, they must show that they understand this famous masculine logic at least as well as the males—and I don't think that would be very hard!

“ ‘After all, you can't really complain if you don't get what you don't ask for, can you? I know you'll see the point, because, as I have always said, women are more fair-minded than those old men!

“ ‘Well, I took what I privately call Cyprian Joe's idea to your Editor, and he said, “Mrs. Floss, if women want to ask for their rights, they'll have to learn to argue. Teach them.”

“ ‘Well, you must admit that was rather a challenge. I don't pretend that I'm at all the sort of person to *teach* you to argue, and I'm quite sure you don't need to be taught. All the same, I thought a few suggestions might help all of us, and we could learn together. That's why I'm starting this series, hoping it will



help to put men in their proper place—which means putting them out of ours ! But, of course, *I* can't carry this thing on without your co-operation. This must be a corporate effort. So, I'm relying on your help, and I'm sure I'll get it. Remember this is a challenge !

" ' Well, I'll start the ball rolling with just one suggestion. When you are arguing, never be *destructive*. Always be *constructive*. Don't pull down. Build up. Don't just show how bad things are, but show how they can be made better.

" ' Well, I'll leave you with that idea till next week. Next week I'll have something else to say, but, remember, I want *your* suggestions. But remember, make them *constructive* ! If we all do that, and pull all together, I believe we will build our Brave New World in next to no time ! ' "

Mrs. Beveridge looked round her with a happy beam. Her eye finally rested on me.

" Isn't that awfully good ? " she asked brightly. " I mean, it's so true that what's wrong with the world is all this destructive criticism, pointing out how wrong things are, instead of looking to see what's right. Don't you think so ? "

" Well," I said, feebly and unconvincingly, " It's nice to be helpful and all that sort of thing. We ought to be bright and constructive and so on. Yes."

" But, don't you also think it's wrong to be *destructive* ? " Mrs. Beveridge demanded.

" No," I was forced to say. " I think it's right. In fact, I think we need a great deal more destructive criticism than we get. If we had it, we might do less destruction."

" Now you're teasing," said Mrs. Beveridge. " I do wish you would be serious."

" I am extremely serious," I answered. " What was more constructive, between the two wars, than the idea of international unity and order ? Yet, the only effect of that idea, sedulously spread, was to destroy, or partly destroy, the idea of national patriotism, in the countries which needed it most. In a complex society it is hardly possible to construct without destroying, and it is advisable to make very sure that you know what you are destroying. Destructive criticism of the policy of disarmament was constructive in effect, because it strengthened national consciousness and reliance on solid forces. Mr. Levi calls himself

constructive, but he is an Attila using constructive phrases. His economic planning will wipe out a heritage of rights, wages, customs, privileges, duties and traditions. His social planning will wipe out liberty. If I speak destructively to Mr. Levi, I am also speaking conservatively."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Levi. Nobody else said anything. Not even Mr. Slattery raised an eyebrow. Quite evidently the feeling of the meeting was against me, so I tried to divide and conquer. I turned to Mr. Chatterjee.

"You are a Nationalist," I said. "You approved of the attitude of non-co-operation adopted by the Congress Party. You may have been right, and you may have been wrong; but surely you were destructive."

"Our ultimate aim is to construct a new India," replied Mr. Chatterjee.

"Admitted. But, whether you can do that or not, nobody knows, not even yourselves. You are not even agreed as to what you would like the new India to be—pacifist or militarist, agricultural or industrial, religious or Communist. All you are agreed on is the destruction of British influence. After that, you will decide on what you will do next, or quarrel about it."

"But they will do *something*," said Mrs. Beveridge gently. "I don't altogether hold with Mr. Chatterjee's friends, but if they're trying to *do* something, you'll have to give them credit for that, won't you? After all, it's easy to sit in an armchair and talk, but it's not so easy to go out and make things better."

"Or worse," I suggested.

The suggestion was ill-received. The company was still against me, so, having failed to detach Mr. Chatterjee, I turned to Mr. Baldero.

"You are a business man," I said, "and you control considerable interests. In your own private affairs, do you not find that destructive criticism is a prime necessity?"

"Certainly not," retorted Mr. Baldero with a trace of heat. "On the contrary. When I have to take a new man on, I look for a chap with bright, constructive ideas."

"What do you do with the ideas?" I asked him.

"Adopt them, if they're really sound," Mr. Baldero said.

"And how do you find that out?" I asked. "You test them, don't you? You submit them to a ruthless destructive criticism,

from all angles, and you find, in nine cases out of ten, that your bright chap's bright idea is a snare and a delusion. You do this because you understand business, and because you have felt the sharp penalties of uncritical construction—you won't build your business house upon sand or general, genial optimism. But, in large affairs, which affect the lives and liberties of millions, your heart warms to every cheap and silly innovation, if only it can be called constructive."

Resentment at my lonely condition had carried me away, and it could hardly be expected that this little lecture would endear my ideas to Mr. Baldero, so I gave him up as lost and turned to Mr. Levi.

"You," I said, "take as your bible a book which is destructive in the highest degree, and you go even further than the book. You want to destroy the faith, the moral framework, the economic system, the social habits, the personal relationships, and even the æsthetics of the present civilisation before you feel free to put anything in its place."

"But that's the point," Mr. Levi said, with an air of great sagacity. "I do want to put something in its place."

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Gudgeon.

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Baldero. "Built up—that's the idea."

I looked at the strange trinity against me.

"You cannot build up," I said as patiently as I could, "until you have destroyed. Therefore, the more 'constructive' you mean to be, the more destructive, in fact, you are. What you call my destructive criticism is, in fact, a persistent objection to rash proposals of social change which will do an immense amount of razing and levelling under the guise of building up. The more you wish to change the existing order, the more necessary you will find it to destroy before you begin; and not only does destruction come first in order of time, but also in order of importance. Cromwell is a good example. Very few maintain that his period of absolute rule was a happy experiment, but very many agree with the saying that at least he taught kings they had a lith in their necks."

"A salutary lesson," said Mr. Gudgeon.

"But purely destructive," I reminded him. "Now, take your own educational philosophy. You talk a great deal about new

methods and subjects of study not yet discovered, but you can hardly pretend to a burning and intimate glow for something you haven't thought of yet. Where does your enthusiasm really come from? Consider your war-cries. 'Abolish the Dual System,' 'Take doctrine out of schools,' 'Get rid of educational lumber,' 'Scrap obsolete buildings,' 'Abolish the public schools.' What is that but destruction?"

"It is clearing the ground," said Mr. Baldero.

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Levi.

"Just so," said Mr. Baldero.

"Now," said Mrs. Beveridge in arch rebuke. "You can see that everybody is against you. Why don't you admit it, and try to be a little bit helpful in the future? I mean, we must try to make this old world of ours a better place, mustn't we? We ought to join together, oughtn't we, and see the best in each other, and go ahead and not grumble, and so on."

I had long known that the good woman was worried and wearied by my arguments, and this was her moment of high triumph. The tribunal was against me. But one member hadn't spoken. Mr. Slattery had been solidly silent, and now he sat looking at his cigarette with an expressionless eye.

"Mr. Slattery," I said, in tones of cordial friendship. "I believe that you at least will admit the justice of my attitude. One of the chief effects of imaginative poetry is to destroy conventional impressions. Another is to destroy the conventional associations of words and images. These effects are destructive."

Mr. Slattery answered, but unwillingly; for he was disinclined to join in the wrangle.

"I think you're arguing in circles," he said. "At least, you are trying to show that what is apparently destructive in what you say is really constructive, or conservative, while what is apparently constructive in what the rest say is really destructive. But it won't wash. Destructive and constructive criticism are not opposites. They are merely two aspects of change."

"You mean the dialectic," said Mr. Levi approvingly.

"I mean damn-all of the kind," replied Mr. Slattery with some violence. "I mean what I say. Constructive criticism is really the positive aspect of change, and the positive is attractive and convincing. You mentioned imaginative poetry, but it wasn't Wordsworth's destructive arguments that won a hearing

for his poetry, but his poetry that won a hearing for his arguments. In the same way, the Impressionists didn't establish themselves by attacking Ingres and his imitators. They established themselves by painting pictures."

"Which were hotly attacked by the imitators of Ingres," I replied. It wasn't much of a reply, but I wanted to gain time, for Mr. Slattery had to be taken with some seriousness. It was in my mind to point out that the analogy from the arts was very deficient, but I remembered in time that I had introduced it myself. On reflection, I thought it better to let the point go, and to insist that it was impossible to advance constructive arguments to people who were previously engaged to constructive views of a very different kind.

The Maginot Line offered itself as an example. Supposing a soldier of the dynamic, offensive school had been asked to suggest improvements on the Maginot Line, he could only have advised the authorities to dismantle it before the Germans did. But that would have been destructive. It would have been impossible for him to have got a hearing for any constructive suggestion till he had convinced the authorities that the Line was a death trap. He would have had a hard job with the brass hats. He would have had to alter their whole bias and their conception of war—indeed, their conception of life—before they could, not would, but *could*, have listened to him. I had something of this on the tip of my tongue when Mr. Chatterjee stepped modestly forward.

"I think I know what you are going to say," he said, fixing his bright, intelligent eyes on me. "You are going to say that our fundamental beliefs are so wrong that we will not be able to accept or even understand your positive principles till our beliefs are radically changed. That may be logically sound, but it is emotionally wrong. We will not be disposed to re-examine our beliefs if we hear nothing from you but negative remarks. You oppose and deny practically everything we say, and that just exasperates us. It is not always socially agreeable, and it gets no results. Supposing you find a child with a dangerous toy, you don't say to the child that the toy is dangerous, and leave it at that. The child is passionately fond of the toy. Therefore, you want to weaken the child's love of the toy."

"You offer him a safe toy, and say how nice it is," said Mrs. Beveridge promptly.

"Exactly," said Mr. Chatterjee. "We are not children, and our principles are, I hope, more serious than toys. But won't you accept the force of the analogy? Won't you offer us something positive and persuade us, by that means, by counter-attraction, to reconsider our fundamental position?"

He was so pleasantly earnest and polite that it was impossible to refuse.

"Very well," I said, with a sigh. "I'll make the attempt, but I warn you it won't work, and I'll prove it now. Here is a positive statement, and we'll see how attractive it is to the company. I believe that the building of a better world is contingent on a return to doctrinal religion."

"Tut, tut!" said Mr. Levi.

"There you are," I said. "Mr. Levi's strong prepossessions against religion will keep him from listening to me."

"What better world are you talking about?" asked Mr. Levi. "Do you mean pie in the sky?"

"No," I replied coldly. "I mean a more stable and decent human society on earth. I mean that, without a clearly held moral basis, society will become savage and sordid and silly, and that a moral basis which is not doctrinal will not last for long. Before I go into vulgar details, I must insist on that. I am prepared to argue that the cardinal virtues are a necessity for a stable and sane community. Doctrinal religion is the guardian of these virtues."

"Well," said Mr. Levi. "I don't know what the Cardinal Virtues are, but it looks as if we were in for a sermon."

"You are," I said, with some malice. "To-morrow night I will read a secular sermon on these virtues."

"Not a bad idea," rumbled Mr. Baldero. "Getting down to first principles."

"I would call it getting back to escapism," said Mr. Gudgeon.

"Well, I wouldn't," said Mrs. Beveridge with spirit. Mr. Gudgeon annoys her even more than I do. "All the same, I don't agree with all these dogmas and doctrines."

I looked at Mr. Slattry.

"The disciples of Ingres don't seem to agree," I said softly. "I fancy it will be rather difficult to paint a picture that will please them all."

## PART TWO

### Chapter One

#### A SECULAR SERMON

**O**N the one side are conscience, and the knowledge of good and evil ; on the other are indolence, selfishness, love of pleasure, or passion."—*Samuel Smiles*.

Dearly Beloved Brethren,

It is a very remarkable fact that anyone who nowadays criticises or objects to a popular scheme for social amelioration is immediately asked, "What is *your* plan for saving the world?" ; it being assumed that any person of average intelligence and sincere good will can take an evening off from billiards or the garden and produce a new moral and material framework for the whole of mankind.

What makes the position even more difficult is the fact that the Planner is expected to begin at the wrong end, by producing a fool-proof scheme for the provision of Vitamin B tablets for expectant mothers in Wolverhampton, and to go on from that, in one agile leap, to a World State, an international army, and the provision of an education in arts and crafts, citizenship, comparative religion and currency problems for the natives of Belgian Congo.

Indeed, it is often believed that the World State will be created in Wolverhampton, out of vitamin tablets. It is argued that, if we can solve the simple problem of Poverty in the midst of Plenty, we will have shown the world how to conduct a beneficent and bloodless revolution, and the angry, perverse, jealous and ambitious nations will immediately love the highest when they see it, and follow Sir Richard Acland to the stars. Our economic success will give us an overwhelming moral ascendancy over the minds of men. Our ambassadors, our publicists, our Union leaders will be Wolverhampton Wanderers, victorious in every field.

I would suggest that this view of life verges on the shallow,

and that to the hungry nations, Poverty in the midst of Plenty expresses itself in other terms. They believe that we have the Plenty and they the Poverty, and the more successful we are in our further schemes, the more they will envy and dislike us. To those who reject this sordid suggestion and prefer to believe that political and social problems present no greater difficulties than the game of Happy Families, I will propose the statement that the preservation of the civilisation we enjoy and the possibility of improvement depend alike on the restoration of the Cardinal Virtues in popular esteem and understanding.

These virtues are four in number—Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance. They are called “cardinal” because they are the hinges on which all other virtues turn. It is my belief that they are as much the hinges of human happiness as they are of salvation, and that the neglect of these virtues is directly traceable to the decline of organised and doctrinal religion.

Take Prudence. Prudence is the virtue born of experience. It leads us to govern our conduct by respect for the unknown and the unpredictable. Prudence is the lamp we light against surprise. Prudence does not enable us to see through the fog of doubt and contingency, but it does enable us to see that the fog is there. It warns us of what we cannot foresee, and is the humbler sister of humility. The prudent man admits and constantly remembers the limitations of his knowledge, and the deficiencies of his specular eye. He recognises, not only that human instincts and motives are too subtle ever to be wholly mastered, but also that the partial knowledge of human nature which we may acquire is difficult to keep and to employ steadily. We are always apt to “forget Goschen,” with bad results.

(Mr. Levi here shifted restlessly and groaned aloud, but I remorselessly continued.)

Prudence also teaches us this aspect of humility, that we will not judge the motives of others by our own. That man is not prudent who imagines that because the provision of vitamin tablets may signify the fullness of life in Wolverhampton, it must also signify the fullness of life everywhere. -The prudent man will not imagine that equal pay for men and women will strike the Mohammedan world with the irresistible conviction of a new and clinching revelation. He will not imagine that equal citizen rights for all will sound very charming in Afrikaans, or



that an equal standard of material comfort and social status for all will convince South Carolina that White Supremacy is an absurdity to be dropped immediately and never again mentioned without a scornful laugh, or a blush of shame.

The prudent man's instinct, on reading the confident prophecies of Karl Marx, must be to say, "This cannot possibly be all true." He will not say this because he is able to point out where Marx is wrong, but he will say it as confidently as he will lay any odds against a tipster naming the first twelve horses home in the Derby; he will back the incalculable against the field. Even if he is persuaded of the theory of the dialectic, he will not be surprised to hear that a strange contender has reached the final, and that the clash is not between Capitalism and the Proletariat, producing Socialism, but between Capitalism and Socialism, producing National Socialism. I am not suggesting that he will have anticipated this development, but that he has always been prepared to find his anticipations wrong.

The prudent man will not, like Sir William Beveridge, announce his intention of killing four or five large Giants with one loud Report. He will recognise the most notable quality of Giants, which is that they are hard to kill, and that even in fairy stories they die, after much risk and pain, only one at a time.

The prudent man will not proclaim to the world, as Mr. Attlee did in 1934, that he and his party recognise no particular duty to their own country, and that they are deliberately putting a world loyalty before loyalty to their native land. The prudent man will question the reality, the force and even the meaning of world loyalty, and will remember that national loyalty has its uses. He will reflect, as Mr. Attlee must have reflected in 1940, that it is well to be on with the new love before you are off with the old. . . .

"Look here," said Mr. Levi indignantly, "I'm fed up with this. Why should I sit here and listen to a Tory attack on Progressive politics, under the disguise of a sermon on moral principles? What about the Guilty Men?"

"It's the Guilty Men I am talking about," I replied. "Mr. Attlee, Mr. Morrison, Mr. Greenwood, Sir Stafford Cripps, Mr. Eden, Mr. Pollitt, Mr. Kingsley Martin, Mr. Victor Gollancz and all his Roman legions, Scipio, Lucius, Tullius, Publius, Junius, Catiline and all the rest, past, present and to come."

"Well—you can chuck it," said Mr. Levi grimly. "I've had enough of that racket."

"That suits me," I replied cheerfully. "Mr. Levi's indignation merely supports my contention that you cannot make constructive suggestion to people who violently dislike your destructive preliminaries. I will abandon Prudence, and go on to Justice."

### JUSTICE

Anyone who reads the *New Statesman*, even occasionally, must have noticed that the most painful lack among our intelligentsia is the lack of proper care for public or political honour. The *New Statesman* has printed comments on our allies (and Mr. Low has drawn cartoons in the same spirit) which can only be described as base.

Now, a sense of honour is simply a fine and imaginative sense of justice. Justice is something above ourselves, an idea whose reference is beyond ourselves. It is something to be served, not something to be used. When Mr. Laski defended the release of Sir Oswald Mosley, he did himself credit, because he was then defending justice, when the result did not please him. But, when Mr. Wells raised an indignant scream at the release, on the grounds, apparently, that housemaids also suffer from infirmities of the leg without being released from prison, he showed, as he has so often and so painfully shown before, that justice has no serious meaning for a man whose ultimate criterion is himself.

Voltaire, or somebody, said that the English had seventy religions and only one sauce. It looks, now, as if they had only one religion, a slack humanitarianism, but two sauces, sauce for the goose and sauce for the gander. The murder of a Left Wing politician shows the ferocity of the Right. But the murder of a Right Wing politician also shows the ferocity of the Right; for the Right must be very ferocious before the Left will be driven to murder them. If the police take notes at a Communist meeting they are accused of intimidation. If they take notes at a Fascist meeting, they are accused of "standing complacently by." If Germany threatened a neighbour that was aggression. If Russia threatened a neighbour, that was realism.

I am far from suggesting that this fault is confined to the Left. Partiality of judgment and wilful blindness to unpleasant facts

that was most painful, and I had no choice but to accept it. Therefore, I put forward the following skimpy paragraphs.

### FORTITUDE

Fortitude is related to Prudence, for imprudence is frequently caused by a panicky anxiety to avoid threatening evils, at the grave risk of greater evils. Men imprudently opposed armament because they did not have the fortitude to consider the realities of life steadily, and to allow for the possibility of another war.

Nothing weakens fortitude so much as a shallow and unthinking optimism. If you can convince yourself that a single effort of intelligence and will is sufficient to banish all the ancient evils of mankind, then the evils become intolerable to you, though countless generations have suffered them in the past and were at least not completely extinguished before their time. There is, of course, much that is generous in a hurried anxiety to get rid of poverty and oppression at once and for ever, but this anxiety saps the endurance of mankind, it destroys the sense of proportion and the understanding of what is possible. Lack of fortitude is one cause of the colossal social error of perfectionism, that creed which teaches that all things can be made whole, at once—can be made whole because they *must* be made whole, and *must* be made whole because all burdens, wrongs and insufficiencies have become simultaneously intolerable.

“Time,” said Mr. Levi.

“Lastly, dear brethren,” I said, “there is Temperance.”

### TEMPERANCE

As perfectionism is a suicidal folly, it is almost inevitable that its enthusiasts should be intemperate in their feelings. They do not base their policies on argument or on consideration of facts, but on catastrophic alternatives—Vitamin B or World Chaos ; Continuation Class or Concentration Camp ; Equality or Universal Slavery. They hug these dilemmas because they are a substitute for patient thought, and are fit topics for declamation and displays of moral feeling. But the facts keep interrupting, and this is extremely exasperating, for facts take a deal of shouting down. The intemperate man simply must believe that his opponents are men of bad will or impregnable stupidity, and the less he is able to insist on the stupidity, the more he must insist

on the bad will. It is the intemperate man who calls his opponent a Fascist or a Communist simply because he cannot answer him.

"Time," said Mr. Levi.

"I deny that," I protested. "You really must not interrupt a preacher in his 'Lastly.' I have a minute to go."

"Could you use that minute to show just how these virtues will guide us in our social policy?" asked Mr. Slattery. "Will you say something solid somewhere?"

"I think I can show one thing," I answered. "I can show that the man who is gifted with prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance will look down his nose hard and long at a planned economy. But it will take me more than a minute."

"It will take you all your life," growled Mr. Levi.

"Not quite so long," I said, "but prepare for something fairly long."

"Would it not be better if you wrote it all down?" asked Mrs. Beveridge. "I mean, we could read it and think over it."

"I will type it for you," I offered. "A copy each."

"That *will* be nice," said Mrs. Beveridge. She didn't mean it, of course. She was only being polite, but I was grateful, all the same. Politeness may not be one of the cardinal virtues, but it certainly oils the hinges.

## Chapter Two

### THE ESSAY

#### FREE ENTERPRISE

#### *A Comment on Popular Superstitions*

THE enquiring man who reads any quantity of popular literature on post-war reconstruction can hardly fail to be struck by the fact that the whole thing is conducted, not by evidence or argument, but by a play upon conditioned reflexes. At the word "Planning," the enthusiast doffs his hat with the brisk respect of a coachman getting his orders, and at the mention of "*laissez-faire*" he laughs loud and long. *Laissez-faire* is of the Dark Ages; it is the economics of Colonel Blimp.

It never strikes the enthusiast that Colonel Blimp is a Planner. He is a member of an organisation which is quite free from the Profit-Motive and is guided in all its ways by Controls from a central directive. In the peace-time Army there is none of the waste and the chaos and the niggardliness that go with private enterprise. There are only the waste, chaos and niggardliness that go with public enterprise. Personal ambition is rudely discouraged in the Army. Ruthless, climbing men, acquisitive of fame or fortune are not permitted to nurse their own crotchets or undertake doubtful adventures which cut across the controls and upset the beneficent equilibrium established by the high directive. Thus, the British Army went to the Crimea well trained to fight the Battle of Waterloo all over again. The guiding hand of the Duke of Wellington was firmly on the controls. It may be said that the great Duke was notoriously conservative and there have been other heads of the Army. Certainly there have been. There was the Duke of Cambridge.

A very popular film was made on the life of Colonel Blimp. It appears that this film had an episode of unarmed combat in which the valiant but flustered Colonel was couped into a swimming bath by some realistic and unconventional Home Guards. The Colonel showed the spirit of the cavalry officer who quitted the Tank Corps at the end of the last war and said, "Thank God, we can now get back to real soldiering." Throwing people into baths was not magnificent, and therefore it was not war. Thus the Colonel argued ; but he went into the water all the same. Now, where in that contest were planning and state control and where the piratical instincts of private enterprise? Colonel Blimp was the creature of King's Regulations and he followed the best traditions of a high-spirited public servant, but he was superannuated in one fell swoop : he was made Commander of the Bath.

It will be said that Colonel Blimp is not the kind of man we will have for democratic planning and control. That is true ; we will have much worse. Colonel Blimp is usually a decent, honest, modest man of unimpeachable courage, who at least knows the physical facts of his job and knows that sooner or later he may have to meet the test of the Profit Motive in battle.

Our planned economy will have very different servants. There is young Harry Blimp, for example. He did very well indeed at

Balliol and his tutor went so far as to say that not nine men in the last eleven years had shown so fine a nose for a rough breathing. He was by no means bad at tennis and he spoke twice in the Union. Everyone knew that Young Blimp would go very far. Half a dozen colleges would have offered him a fellowship at the drop of a hat, and even in Cambridge he was admitted to exist. But he forsook the cloister for the great pulsing world of big government business. See him, now, in the post-war world, a hard-boiled, two-fisted industrialist with hair on his lip. During the war he had gone from factory to factory stimulating aircraft production, dropping a word of encouragement in one place and falling over his feet in another. Now, when peace has returned, he is in charge of the hardware section of the Ministry of Export Control. He is the dynamic force behind a flexible, audacious, imaginative policy of selling hardware in markets where he is met with the unlettered competition of American business men who think rough breathing is scarcely polite, but who do know about hardware and are responsible to shareholders who know red ink when they see it.

But young Harry is not alone. He is supported by Honest Tom Blimp of the Amalgamated Society of Picture-Frame and Ornamental Beading Operatives. Honest Tom left school at thirteen, and it took him thirty years before he found time to regret it. He became a disciple of Ruskin and William Morris, a lay preacher and a temperance lecturer, a Sunday School organiser and the warm personal friend of some pretty violent atheists in the Union. He also sang a useful bass in the local choir. At the age of twenty-six he stopped manual work for once and all to become treasurer of the Picture-Framers' Union. He was a good treasurer, solidly competent and unimpeachably honest, and he showed respectable qualities of drive and imagination when he carried his great amalgamation scheme. The Ornamental Beaders were reluctant to throw in their lot with the Framers, but Honest Tom pegged at them with the idea of One Big Union till the great work was done. The results of the amalgamation were not blindingly evident to the members, except in a slight increase of subscription, but they were painfully obvious to the treasurer of the Ornamental Beaders who had to resign in favour of the idea of One Big Treasurership. After that, Tom never looked back. On the other hand, he never

looked forward. He contested his native constituency nine times, being twice successful, at a long interval, and it was plain that his political career would be chequered, at the best. His salary from the Union was rather niggardly and his pension was not even secure. Picture-framing itself, and ornamental beading, were not what they had been. Mass production of picture frames should have gratified Tom's wish to see the resources of Science used unselfishly for the public weal, but the thought of Ruskin and his pension made him very hostile to this development. As for plastics, a lifetime spent in Temperance work had deprived him of appropriate speech to express his sentiments. The thought of amalgamating with Unions which countenanced such low devices filled him with indignation, but he knew in his heart that he was fighting a losing battle ; his chair would one day be pulled from under him. Then, he wasn't at all well. He had twinges in various and surprising places, and the pains in his back, he said, were something hellish. So it was a flattering honour and a great relief to Tom when he was appointed to the Hardware Exporting Board. He gets on splendidly with young Harry. They have a quiet smoke together whenever there is nothing doing in the export trade, which is often.

There is also the Honourable Violet Blimp. Her father was Governor of St. Helena at one time, but he did not leave much. She has long been noted for her interest in houses and house appliances. She has the woman's point of view in such things. She thinks aluminium is polished zinc.

The enthusiast will naturally call this picture a travesty. He has in his mind a completely imaginary situation and an ample supply of imaginary persons to fill all posts with vigorous efficiency and unrelenting zeal. But the ideal situation is only a sketch on paper, and the controllers are only characters from the novels of H. G. Wells. What I have described is certain to happen, is, in fact, happening now. If business becomes a political matter, it will be run by political persons. Young Harry will get his job because the Civil Service is already full of young Harrys. Honest Tom will get his job because we must do something for Honest Tom, and because Violet must also get a job. Violet's is a snob appointment, and Tom's is a mob appointment. The toiling masses will agree to Violet if Tom gets a look in ; the selfish cabal will agree to Tom if Violet is not left in the lurch.

Imagine, now, what will happen when the Board is in operation. A hardware manufacturer sees a chance of selling some pots in Tahiti. How his agent has secured this opportunity he is careful not to enquire, but there are certain expenses which give a new and livelier meaning to the category of "Sundries." Anyway, the manufacturer has this contract, but he can't fulfil it until an Import Board gives him a licence for the raw materials, a Man-Power Board gives him permission to employ his own men, an Exchange Board gives him power to buy his materials, and young Harry Blimp's Board gives him permission to sell the finished goods. Now, it should be obvious that young Harry's Board cannot give him permission off their own bat. There is no point in having a planned economy if every department has the power to act in a recklessly individual way and make decisions on its own. An export of hardware to Tahiti must be fitted into a picture of exports of hardware everywhere, and all the hardware exports into a picture of all exports of all kinds, and that picture balanced with a companion picture of all imports of all kinds, and these two fitted into a triptych of Exports, Imports and Currency. By the time the manufacturer's application has been stamped and considered by a dozen authorities and has been lost, by an amusing mischance, for six months in the Electrical Appliances department, it might be useful, with mustard, as an application to Honest Tom's lumbago, but it has no other practical meaning. For, either the natives of Tahiti have been forced to use French hardware under the French Plan, or they are using American hardware, or they have gone back to coconut shells, and Want in the Midst of Plenty.

Naturally, this kind of thing cannot go on for ever. It is an assumption of Social Security that our export trade must be recaptured and expanded, and that cannot be done under a system which shows a total lack of adaptability, initiative and decision. Planning and control will provide such a system, and the more complex and complete the control, the more catastrophic the results will be. No doubt you are all familiar with the story of Commander Smith. It is a legend of the British Admiralty, and of many another office. One officer, whose work kept piling up on his desk and detained him till late at night, was surprised to see that a light-hearted colleague was always able to leave early. He spoke to his colleague and asked for an



explanation. "Oh, it's quite easy," was the reply. "I write on every document, 'Refer to Commander Smith.' You see, in a big place like this, there is bound to be somebody called Commander Smith." "There is," said the other coldly. "I am Commander Smith." That legend is a lesson in the first stage of confusion and evasion, but there is a more advanced stage. What happens in the office where there is nobody called Commander Smith? That is what you will find with really big planning, when there is nobody willing, or even able, to make quick and firm decisions.

As the whole complex, cumbersome and extravagant system of Social Security will depend upon the prosperity of our exports trade, it is there that something like the test of the profit motive will continue to be made, though very indirectly and much behind events. The thing may happen gradually, or we may have a scare comparable to the Gold Standard scare of 1931; the Snowdens and MacDonalds of the new palace revolution are already mentally conditioned for their part—but this time a more modest part. A Doctor's Mandate will be demanded, and a worried, bewildered electorate will have no option but to give it. But it will not be possible to make any democratic use of the mandate. To infuse some speed, flexibility and prudent anticipation into our managed commerce, it will be necessary to scrap our traditional Civil Service methods, and that will mean that the planning commissions will no longer be seriously answerable to Parliament. This may not be difficult to put through. After all, the people who are now shouting for controls as blithely and eagerly as if controls were free drinks, are the very same people who denounced Dora in 1918. They are now giving their support to every man who asks awkward and destructive questions in Parliament, but what they now call a spirited independence they are quite capable of calling reactionary obstruction when the wheel turns round.

But it will not be enough to decide that red tape and circumlocution must go. Young Harry's philosophic mind may be disturbed, but it will not be changed, and old Tom's trading instincts will not recover readily from his long training in the parsimonious and conservative handling of the Picture-Framers' financial resources. If hardware is to be sold, it will be necessary for the Blimps to abdicate in favour of men who can sell

hardware. The Blimps will not be dismissed, of course (no British crisis will ever be as critical as that), but they will suddenly detect a change in the atmosphere. The industrialists who came to the office, looking haggard and trying hard to be patiently polite, will come in, one day, with a dominating eye and, after a few blistering remarks on the state of the pound sterling, they will get down to business. Young Harry will find himself doing what he is told, and old Tom will have to take his lumbago out into the corridor. Having seen the sinister spectacle of business run by Civil Service methods, we will then see the spectacle, no less sinister, of the Civil Service run by business methods.

But although the crisis will give industrialists some elbow room, it will not by any means lead to a free economy. There will be so many rigid elements in our social system, so many charters, commitments and domestic controls that foreign trade will be an instrument of home policy. There will be an ever-sharpening need of exports to buy imports. This may well turn minds towards the beauties of dumping. There are three kinds of dumping. First, there is the dumping practised by nations which find themselves with a natural surplus of certain goods ; the home market has yielded its full profit and is saturated, and any price at all for what is left is clear gain. Obviously, this form of dumping is a luxury which cannot be indulged by many nations, or by any over a large range of goods. The second form is the dumping by economically weak nations which are not self-sufficient and which simply must get the essential imports. What they take for their exports is what they can get, and represents not the costs of what they export but the cost of their imports. The goods dumped by this necessity are by no means surplus. Hungry men may see their wheat taken from them to be sold at thief's prices for machinery ; or it may pay a man to buy goods of his own country in a foreign country and smuggle them back. That is Planning. That, we learned in school, is what the American War of Independence was about. We lost that war.

But there is a third method of dumping, much more agreeable to the dumping country than the others. That consists of dropping your stuff on your neighbour's doorstep and saying, " Take it and like it." That is the method of Dr. Schacht, who exported mountains of aspirin tablets, train loads of mouth organs, avalanches of spectacle lenses without frames and long processions

of lorries without tyres. Dr. Schacht's business policy was to demand from neighbouring countries what he wanted and to give in exchange whatever he happened to have to spare. It was a very comfortable policy. Even an Export Board could do business on those terms.

But the policy could only be exercised on countries which were economically or militarily dependent on Germany. The dependent countries were in the pathetic position of the small tradesman who has one wealthy and arrogant customer. Even although that customer keeps him waiting for his money and his orders really represent a loss, he dare not make a firm stand and lose the cursed trade. He would get nothing and lose everything. Germany's servile tradesman had the additional deterrent that he feared the arrogant customer, if offended, would send his burly footman to teach the lower orders their proper place. The Luftwaffe was Schacht's most plausible salesman.

Now, it is not easy to see what goods Britain can produce in such lavish quantity that she will have a surplus to get rid of at throwaway prices and without inconvenience. Neither is it easy to see what neighbouring countries are so dependent on Britain that she can apply a conclusive pressure. We are then left with the most wretched form of dumping, selling at a loss to purchase necessities. But our state will be worse than that, for the purchase of our "necessities" will be decided on political and not on economic grounds, and our dumping will probably be done by indirect means, so that we will have no accurate means of knowing if the game is worth the candle or indeed, what the candle costs.

Another way out is bilateral trading, which is a negotiated lebensraum. It should be hardly necessary to indicate the disadvantages of this system for Britain. First, a country which depends largely on banking, the handling of investments and the carrying trade cannot indulge in direct barter without the severest dislocation of its economy. Secondly, Britain, being the centre of a very varied Empire, cannot make barter arrangements with a single eye on economic profit; she must give weight to political considerations. Thirdly, in any barter bargain that country will come off worse which has most need of the bargain, and Britain will be the more desperate negotiator in almost any deal. Fourthly, the profitable trend of British manufacturing appears to be towards quality and away from mere quantity,

and quality production demands the widest possible market. Fifthly, no country will have greater need of international good will than Britain will have, and no economic policies are more conducive of bad will than dumping and bilateral trading. Sixthly, barter arrangements are an invitation to economic crime of the nature of black-market trading and the prevention of that crime will make necessary all kinds of uncomfortable vigilance. Trading with a country outside of the lebensraum will be Trading with the Enemy and will only be prevented by police methods applied to the whole of industry and commerce. Seventhly, bilateral trading lends itself, indeed, offers itself, to log-rolling. A limited but guaranteed market is the happy hunting ground of monopolists and wire-pullers. Some men will do well out of it, and the rest will be put out of business. It is a long time since Adam Smith pointed out that merchants are the only class whose interests do not necessarily coincide with the general interest. There are many things which Adam Smith pointed out, and which have since been forgotten but not disproved.

The objections to bilateral trading are so patent and so enormous that nobody would seriously consider it if any alternative could be seen. A retreat from free trading to barter would be as crippling a step as the abandonment of joint stock companies. But desperate disease demands desperate remedies, and, failing those, desperate palliatives. Under scientific planning, the condition of our export trade will be desperate enough and the most destructive remedies will not lack enlightened patronage ; they do not lack it now.

It is not suggested that the progress of a planned economy must follow, in order of time, the progress plotted above, but that is the order of logic and necessity. A far-sighted Socialist who has no faith in Harry Blimp may leap over the frying pan straight into the fire, but, whatever wild efforts are made to avoid it, the draining of our choking internal channels to keep our export trade from collapse seems to be unavoidable. (Our internal channels will be choking because they, also, will be planned.) What will have to be done to keep things going will be impossible to do under democracy or the pretence of democracy, and British Nazism will endeavour to provide a political answer.

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course for Britain is the exact opposite of the course which is constantly preached by Government spokesmen and Left Wing propagandists. At present, industry and trade are bound by a large number of necessary or alleged necessary war-time controls. We should get rid of these controls at the first possible moment, and take such measures as are necessary not merely to restore, but to increase the degree of free initiative enjoyed by industry and commerce before the war. Whatever the State does, with its enormous resources, should be done to support and not to supplant private enterprise. Planners are not blind to the necessity of enterprise ; they are only blind to its nature. Mr. Herbert Morrison has said in his laconic-pontifical manner that he is not deeply concerned to argue for public enterprise as against private enterprise ; " public " or " private " is of secondary importance ; he puts the emphasis on " enterprise." He had better put the emphasis on " private " also, and expect rather more from the private man whose safety depends on being enterprising than from the public official whose safety depends upon being unenterprising.

In a great many quarters, opposition to " controls " will be met with nothing more logical than loud cries of indignation and scorn. For private and free enterprise is wedded to the profit motive, and the profit motive is held to be a relic of barbarism, a survival of the bad old world which must never return, a completely obsolete and immoral instrument which can only reduce our economy into increasing and hopeless chaos, a theory based on a view of human nature and its possibilities which has been proved time and again to be disastrously inadequate and misguided. A new principle in industry has been born. With this principle, accepted in faith and intelligent vision, we shall be saved. With the old principle we are lost.

Now, it is a fact not to be lightly disregarded that we have heard these words before, and from the same speakers. We have seen these moral gestures before, and admired these moral attitudes. We were taken in by them, and we followed our leaders, and ran down a steep place into the sea.

But they were used about another barbaric principle ; they were used about physical force. The same men told us that force was a barbaric relic of the most deadly potency, which must at once be talked out of existence, that War, like Capitalism,

simply "didn't work"; that generals were silly men who did not know their own silly business; that poor old Colonel Blimp would be funny if he was not so sad; that the hopeless inadequacy of the military mind was sufficiently shown by the fact that Marshal Foch was a fairly successful soldier and yet was utterly unable to see the patent and glorious fact of the new, peaceable Germany; that even although Lloyd George began to waken from his jingo delirium in time to talk, in Paris, of a peace made in Heaven or Hell (and just in time to sponsor a peace made in Purgatory), the men of the woods, who poisoned the Conference, were still thinking on all fours and believed that a strong man armed would keep his house in peace.

Such was the archaic folly, but the truth would prevail. It could be stated in one sentence: "From the danger of war one cannot protect oneself by weapons." That was the new discovery which turned the old maxims of prudence upside down, as Galileo had turned the old astronomy upside down. The thing was as demonstrable as a proposition of Euclid. "Enunciation: 'From the danger of war one cannot protect oneself by weapons.' Proof: This ought to be true. Therefore it will be true. Therefore it is true. Q.E.D."

But the new geometry has fallen on evil days. It is difficult to believe that such a statement could ever be made by a serious man on a serious occasion, and almost impossible to believe that it could have been made anywhere, by anybody, after Hitler had come to power. But it was publicly made by a leading man in a great political party (he became a leading man in the war effort), in 1935, and he spoke not only for himself, and not only for his party but for a multitude outside; for the equivalent of progressive Toryism was pacifist in those days, and the Liberals, having dropped Retrenchment and having been dropped by Reform, had put their shirt on Peace.

The profit motive may not be sufficiently idealistic for Utopian economists, but it is still a respectable motive, and it is still indispensable where it applies. To say that it does not apply everywhere is not to say that it need not apply anywhere. Utopians say in tones of triumph that the Navy operates without the profit motive. That is true, and it is also true that the Air Force operates without the steam engine; but the steam engine is still the best machine for certain jobs, and the profit motive



is best for certain other jobs. The profit motive is open to abuse, as every other human motive is open to abuse. It may be worked harshly and inequitably, just as planned efficiency may be worked harshly and inequitably, in the hands of harsh and inequitable men. But it will not often be used consciously to starve the countryside to feed the town, or underpay the town to subsidise the countryside. Life cannot be run solely on economic considerations, but the profit motive does separate economic considerations from others.

That is what the Utopians very obviously fail to do. The enthusiast maintains that to keep all persons at school till they are eighteen is an economically sound proposal. It is admitted by all, and trumpeted abroad by the enthusiast, that compulsory education to the age of fourteen has not been much of a success ; but the enthusiast takes this as an infallible reason for greatly extending our commitments, relying on teaching methods and topics which have yet to be discovered, and increasing our expense very largely. This argument is not self-evidently wrong, but if enthusiasts had to pay personally for its consequences, it may be doubted if they would so readily accept that it is self-evidently right.

If a commercial firm had spent quite large sums on an advertising campaign with disappointing results, the advertising manager might well plead that results could not be expected till he is permitted to spend enormously more, to attract far more and better canvassers by large increases in wages, and to adopt new and brighter advertising methods which he has not yet thought of, but which experience will bring to him as he goes on his way. He might show a great flow of language and a great mastery of apt analogy in putting his case, but he would have to produce something more solid than eloquence before he persuaded his company to sign large cheques on his lively expectations.

Not so with the high-souled custodians of the public finances. Spending public money is the purest of human pleasures. It gratifies the instincts of power and benevolence, and it enables men to rise above those narrow, timid and selfish inhibitions which cramp their private activities and pin them down to the level of sordid and interested calculation. If you ask can we afford an enormously expensive and worse than dubious educational

experiment, you are told, "We can't afford not to have it." Can we afford to undertake huge commitments in national reconstruction? Can we afford to undertake parallel commitments in the Empire? We can't afford not to. Can we afford to undertake European commitments on the same scale? We can't afford not to. Can we afford to institute complete Social Security? We can't afford not to. Can we afford to pay for a comprehensive medical service of the most lavish type? We can't afford not to. Can we afford to maintain a huge armament? It is admitted, this time with grief and reluctance, that we can't afford not to.

The question arises—what *can* we afford not to have? If we spend more than we can afford in many directions (*i.e.* more than the results justify economically), then we will have to spend less than we should be able to afford in others. If an enormous bureaucracy is shut off from the criticism of the profit motive and is free from any accurate consideration of the material value of its work, then the profit motive will bear with an ever sharper edge on the truly productive workers. The salaries of the bureaucracy and wages in such trades as have won a politically guaranteed standard will be paid by exploiting the unsheltered industries. Miners, steelworkers, millhands and the like will have to work to pay for the teachers in County Colleges, for the comprehensive medical servants and all the gadgets they may care to order out of curiosity, for the infant psychologists, for the liaison officers between mother and child, the cultural advisers to the Army, the British Council lecturers on English Gothic in Patagonia and all the other public workers we can't afford not to have. In addition, they will have to pay for the relatively well-paid workers of the sheltered occupations, which are mostly municipal or monopoly concerns, wholly or partly free from the profit motive and the loss criticism. The burden will be heavy, and if any productive industry manages, by political pressure, to remove itself from the profit arena, the burden will be heavier still on those that remain.

This fact has not escaped the attention of our planners. They are beginning to show a certain degree of sharp realism, even the beginnings of acerbity, in their approach to the productive industries. It is now accepted that industry must not expect large profits except by greatly increased production. It is put

in such a way as to appeal to the simple worker, but the simple worker is being deceived by a conjuring trick. His attention is diverted in the wrong direction. In the productive industries, profit must govern wages just as much as it governs dividends. The workers will not be able to improve their standard of living until they have met the cost of the fairly stable standards of the metaphysically essential persons who are doing jobs which don't much appeal to the worker, if they appeal at all. That will mean a standard of productiveness and a rate of reward which will be highly unattractive. The workers can't expect high wages unless they produce a very great deal.

Under a free economy that would mean the eventual collapse of the system, for the productive workers would look for jobs which had the uneconomic guarantee of political pressure. Engineers would become tram-drivers and steelworkers municipal dustmen. That had happened to a considerable extent between the wars, and for every twelve miners we had in 1914 we had seven in 1940. It had gone so far, indeed, that war compelled the Government to "do something about it," and attempts were made to coax miners out of factories back to the pits and engineers back to the ship-yards. That will have to be done much more thoroughly and more efficiently in a fully planned economy. The controls which are so loudly advertised as a bit and bridle for big business will curb the worker much more severely. The conjuring trick may deceive the eye, but hard experience will expose it, in no very long time.

There is no point in being able to plan the location of industry and dispose of priorities in building and equipment if you are unable to offer priorities of labour. You can mechanise mines, you can rationalise mines, you can nationalise mines, but you will still go short of coal if you are short of miners. Because direction to mining raises very special difficulties, the miners may be able to do fairly well for themselves; but, the better they do, the worse other productive workers will do, and the worse they do, the more necessary will direction become.

If direction is generally resented and resisted, the politicians will be faced with the alternative of open force or uneconomic concessions in the unpopular trades; which will mean running productive industries without regard to profit. That will result in a crisis, and the crisis will put the most potent of all weapons

into the hands of the administrators who step into power : the weapon is panic.

The crisis will come, in the nature of things, and it may very well be hurried on by deliberate device ; for panic destroys judgment, and it puts the whole game into the hands of the rulers. The rulers will be new men, in all probability. In 1931, men of different parties who loudly proclaimed that they had taken turns at bringing the country to the verge of ruin offered themselves as a coalition to bring the country back from the verge, and were richly rewarded by a flood of votes. But, that is not likely to happen again. The political leaders are more likely to make a disguised abdication in favour of men who have not yet lost the public trust. Unless there is a resurgence of native intelligence and spirit, the new men will be nasty men. They may create a workable machine, but it will not work to fulfil the ends which answer to the deepest Christian instincts of the simple man. Instead of the private man, educated in citizenship, being able to control the whole of private life, public men will be able to control the whole of private life. All invasions of liberty and all denials of ordinary comfort will be demanded of people who have been made to see an abyss of starvation and disorder opening before them. Citizenship in schools will be a conditioning of servility and the vote will be a token of submission to economic destiny.

“ Good morrow, Citizen. A hollow word.”

## Chapter Three

### REACTIONS

**M**R. BALDERO offered me a cigar. That was a clear indication that he had read my little essay and that some of it, at least, had given him satisfaction. He is not always delighted with my opinions and conjectures. A level-headed and capable man, he always recognises humbug at short range, but he is apt to become flurried when principles

which he knows to be sound in his own affairs are applied to remoter activities where sentimentalities and stupidities escape the test of his own practical experience. But he knows all about planning as it affects his own considerable business, and he is not only pleased but positively grateful when somebody who has no axe to grind speaks up for him and his kind. He rarely speaks up for himself, because he is accustomed to hearing and reading that capitalists are stupid and sordid men. He does not believe this, but he thinks that those who do believe it are not to be argued with. So, he listens with distaste and a kind of irritable hostility which his critics mistake for a sense of deficiency and shame. The same mistake is often made by politicians who find themselves in charge of a war and set about telling generals how to run it. The generals listen sullenly to their bold strategical schemes and contribute nothing to the conference but "No," not because they are overwhelmed by the large and subtle manoeuvres which are presented to them, but because they think they are so damn silly that the man who can entertain them for a moment can only be cured of one huge error at the expense of driving him into something worse. Knowing what they know from incommunicable experience, they distrust books and plausible speeches, which is a mistake, for there is a good deal to be learned from books and a little, even, from speeches.

In normal times, the practical man might brush aside the notions of the theorists with some good-nature ; but the times are not normal. The man of affairs is lectured by a strong team of intellectuals who, between them, might be able to run a small branch post-office, but could not safely be trusted with any larger interest. The man of affairs feels that the large and obvious facts of the case entitle him to the public verdict without argument, and is both vexed and baffled to discover that the public verdict goes against him. He is therefore unduly gratified when some person from another world of activity finds something to say in his favour. Hence Mr. Baldero's cigar. .

I did not deceive myself that Mr. Baldero fully accepted, or even followed, the wider implications of my little essay. He is no more apt than most other men of affairs to look beyond his own nose, but so far as his nose extended we were at one. He told me stories of the maddening and farcical experiences of himself and his colleagues with Government controls, but he did

not continue once Mr. Gudgeon and Mr. Levi came into the room, for he is morbidly anxious to avoid controversy.

Mr. Gudgeon looked at me with an air of semi-benevolent patronage.

"I enjoyed reading your essay," he said. "I hadn't imagined that anybody could still pen a defence of the Manchester School, as if nothing had happened since the days of Cobden."

"What *has* happened since the days of Cobden?" I asked mildly.

Mr. Gudgeon waved his hand.

"Private enterprise has worked out its own destruction," he said grandly. "The choice is not between private enterprise and free competition, on the one hand, and public ownership. It is between monopoly of common ownership and monopoly of capitalist ownership. Whether we like it or not, competition is a thing of the past, and monopoly is quite simply inevitable."

"Whether we like it or not," I repeated. "It seems to me a very peculiar thing that that phrase is always used by people who 'like it,' and never by people who don't. It isn't a form of argument, but a species of suggestion. It's the same thing with 'inevitable.' You don't insist a thing is inevitable unless you want it to happen."

"Monopoly is inevitable," growled Mr. Levi. I knew he hadn't read my essay, and I also knew that he would be very unwilling to admit it. "Everybody knows it. You can see it on all hands."

"Even if you saw it on all hands," I answered, "which I deny, why would that prove it was inevitable?"

"Because it is the working of an inevitable economic law," Mr. Levi said with much vigour.

"It seems to me that you are saying this thing is inevitable, because—it is inevitable," I suggested. "Leaving that point, let us look at economic laws. I think there are some economic laws which may decently be called laws, and whose working is inevitable, more or less, and there are other 'laws' which are no more than rough and unreliable observations. The first laws deal with the purely physical world. If you put a certain amount of manure on a field, the increased yield will more than pay for the manure; but there comes a time, as you increase the manure, when the increase of yield will not pay for the cost of the extra manure. That is a physical fact. It is also a physical fact that,

as you approach the maximum speed of the Queen Mary, every extra knot requires a disproportionate consumption of oil. The law of diminishing returns does enable you to make confident predictions. But what about Gresham's Law? It states that depreciated money will drive gold out of circulation. But this is not true if, say, paper and gold are freely interchangeable, and the 'law' did not operate when the British silver coinage was debased in our own lifetime. Also, if gold disappears from circulation it may disappear into private stockings or be surrendered to the Government, according as people put their own private interest or the public interest first. Whichever happens will depend on human response, and that can only be guessed at."

"It's pretty easy to guess," said Mr. Levi with a knowing grin.

"You guessed wrong in the Abyssinian crisis," I replied, "when Mussolini drew the gold wedding rings from the fingers of Italian women with complete disregard for economic law. I should like to know whether the laws which make monopoly inevitable are based on a mental condition, social arrangement or physical facts. What *are* these laws?"

"But the thing is undeniable," Mr. Gudgeon protested.

"I deny it," I answered. "Explain the economic forces which work irresistibly on the side of monopoly."

"Well, the larger an economic organisation is, the more efficient and economical it will be," said Mr. Gudgeon. "It will manufacture better and sell cheaper."

"Not in the least," said Mr. Baldero.

"The thing is certainly not obvious," I amended. "The efficiency of the mastodon has been severely criticised. In some activities there is a great gain from keeping the unit small, and in some a gain from increasing the size of the unit. But it would be hard to think of any where complete monopoly is economically desirable. In fact, the tendency of many existing quasi-monopolies is to sell rather dear—not necessarily from inordinate greed, but because a stiff price provides a comfortable margin to offset the loss occasioned by a rather lethargic, complex and impersonal organisation. Incomparably the most successful mining companies, during the war period of acute coal shortage, were the small companies of Leicestershire."

"I was not suggesting that capitalist combines will pass the benefits of monopoly on to the public," said Mr. Gudgeon.

"But, if you look at what happens to small shops you will see how hopeless the individualist struggle is."

"Almost everything I buy is bought in what you would call small shops," I answered. "But they are all very prosperous shops. Undoubtedly, a great many small shops fail to pay and disappear. That is because they are badly placed and badly run. Their failure is a bitter personal tragedy, but, if you take social advance as simply a matter of increasing material productiveness, it is a beneficial result. But, if branch shops of big combines fail to pay, they may still be carried on, which is a bad result from every point of view. The larger the combine, the less sharply the profit-motive operates in every branch, and the more likely are uneconomic enterprises to be carried."

"You get personal attention in private shops," said Mr. Baldero. "You get civility. That's worth a lot."

"What is it worth against the large combine's power to get heavy discounts by bulk purchase?" asked Mr. Gudgeon.

"What right has the large concern to that discount?" I asked.

"Every right," said Mr. Gudgeon. "It's cheaper to make a hundred thousand pairs of stockings than a hundred pairs. Therefore, the big buyer gets a discount."

"But it's cheaper to make one hundred thousand and one hundred pairs than it is to make one hundred thousand," I replied. "It is on the total production that a manager makes his most considerable saving, not on a single order. He does not manufacture one hundred thousand pairs of stockings, cheaply, for a big firm, and then manufacture one hundred pairs of the same stockings expensively for a small firm. What happens with differential discount is that the large concern gets the saving on its own order and also on the smaller orders."

"Sometimes there is a special saving on a single order," said Mr. Baldero.

"That may be so," I admitted. "If such a saving can be demonstrated, I would allow a special discount. All other discounts I would make illegal."

"Dear me, government interference!" said Mr. Gudgeon in mock horror. "We will soon have you a planner."

"Of course, it is government interference," I answered. "Government interferes to prevent robbery, embezzlement and fraud and to enforce contracts. But the difference between such



activities and what you call planning is not a matter of degree. It is a difference in kind. Your legislation is positive, usurping the functions of the private man, but mine is negative, protecting the functions of the private man. It is the difference between teaching your grandmother how to suck eggs and preventing one grandmother from grabbing all the eggs. I would legislate with the purpose of removing the mere deadweight advantage of capital and the uneconomic use of great resources to squeeze out competition. For example, I would make it illegal for any firm to sell any article at less than cost price. Given an awakening from the dream of 'inevitable' monopoly, it would not be impossible to work out a code of commercial law which would work, not perfectly, but well enough to give us the benefits of free enterprise. Even without such laws, I don't believe that monopoly will ever be anything like complete, without the positive interference of the law. I believe that the conservative tendency engendered by the need to protect enormous and cumbersome capital will in turn produce a static mentality which will have to call increasingly on the law to interfere on its side, to give protection from the inroads of invention and adaptability. 'Controls' may prove in the end very agreeable to semi-monopolies, for they can be used to control rivals out of business. We have many present indications of the monopoly state of mind in Socialist proposals. For example, the Socialists want to nationalise all gas and electricity companies. They propose to forbid anyone to manufacture gas or electricity for private use, and also to compel a proportion of the consumers to use gas, whether they like it or not, to protect the capital sunk in gas. Planning will cripple all novel development; Socialism will blanket it altogether."

"What about Russia?" demanded Mr. Levi. "Under a Socialist economy, every development in modern science is eagerly studied and adopted."

"What about psychology?" I asked. "That is the most modern and the most recently developed of the sciences. But the theories of the sub-conscious reduce the whole philosophic basis of Marxism to the level of shallow chatter. I am not offering these theories as gospel, but they are the latest thing in science, and they won't go down in your fatherland because they are a dissolvent criticism of the structure of the State. As

for the physical sciences, I haven't noticed that experimental workers and students have found it necessary to learn Russian, though they did find it necessary to learn German, to follow the authoritative lead of bourgeois Germany. But, in spite of the twaddle and fantastic nonsense issued so abundantly by the stool-pigeon societies for relations with U.S.S.R., it is very obvious that, in their great schemes of industrial expansion, Russia has followed the authoritative technical leadership of capitalist America. Even at that, because of the cataract of lies and rubbish with which we are deafened, we are unable to tell if the achievement in production is as impressive as the energy, enthusiasm and sacrifice expended on the Plan.

"But suppose the achievement is very great. Supposing that revolutionary enthusiasm, supplemented by the gun, the timber camp, starvation *and* the profit motive have provided an effective substitute for the single operation of the profit motive in a free economy, the test of Socialist planning will not come until planning is completed, till some invention is produced, most likely in a capitalist country, which has the potentiality of very rapidly reducing the value of huge installations to scrap, of invalidating the skill of the experts who will report on the invention and of dislocating the disposition of labour to a very serious degree. Then, I think you will find, the strongest opposition to radical change in Russia, as you would find it in any planned economy; for a plan can only allow for simple, direct and foreseeable developments, and not for the surprising turns and twists and sudden developments of undreamt-of powers which have been the characteristics of a free economy."

Mr. Levi merely shook his head to this, and muttered something to the effect that I was past arguing with. But Mr. Gudgeon took up the debate on other ground.

"You appear to be perfectly satisfied with the misery and the chaos of the unplanned and acquisitive system we have. It seems to me incredible that you should be so complacent about human suffering and wasted effort. I thought that even from mere self-interest, any propagandist for capitalism would have to agree that something must be done to relieve the lot of the exploited and toiling millions."

Mr. Gudgeon spoke with real feeling. He looked more attractive, more deeply earnest and more human than I had

ever seen him look before. It struck me that though he was a shockingly bad teacher, he might have made a very respectable Labour M.P.

"As for the misery," I said, "it is really necessary to keep some sense of proportion. It is a wretched thing that millions should lead grimy, dull, uninteresting lives, that some should have too little for elementary material needs all the time, and that a large number should have too little at certain times. But, if we are going to say that *laissez-faire* is the cause of this situation, we must ask what the situation really is. The situation is this, that more wage-earners live above the subsistence level than below it, and that the surplus of those who are above is much greater than the deficiency of those who are below. In fact, a redistribution of working-class incomes would finance social security on the Beveridge standard and leave all the working class with a subsistence, in or out of work. That is a result of *laissez-faire*, and, in view of the sad story of the human condition, I suggest it is a remarkable result."

"Are you going to drive the workers down to a subsistence level?" demanded Mr. Levi hotly. "My God, talk about exploiting the masses! You'll give them just enough to live on, and then work them to death. Keep them on a starvation pittance and squeeze the last drop of sweat out of them. You call that Christianity."

"You know equally little about starvation and Christianity," I answered coldly, "because you have experienced neither. There is no starvation in Britain, and it is an impertinence to the nations who really are starving to pretend that there is."

"He doesn't exactly mean starvation—" Mr. Gudgeon began.

"Then don't let him say it," I answered. "The use of such words with no justification is morally wrong. Nothing more clearly shows the smug selfishness of the glib humanitarians. They are perfectly indifferent to starvation or any other abominable scourge so long as it suits their political book, and when it pays them to flaunt starvation they will make a loud cry about starving children in India, and at the same time make a loud cry of nearly equal volume because some young woman in a factory is paid so badly that, after she has met her living expenses, she has no more to spend on the pictures than an Indian factory worker can earn altogether for himself, his wife and his children.

A peasant's baby starving in India is the victim of the reactionary stubbornness of the Government, but a peasant's baby starving in the Ukraine was the victim of the reactionary stubbornness of the peasant. Humanitarianism of that kind doesn't leave me cold ; it makes me hot."

"Humanitarianism isn't all of that kind," said Mr. Slattery. "You are making the mistake so often made by the Right. You lump all the Left together. It makes a nice big target but it leads to indiscriminate bombing."

There was too much truth in this for me to deny it, and I admitted that I had been unfair to some, even to most of those who answer to the name "humanitarian." But I denied that I was unfair to the Communists or their typical hangers-on. Proofs of their indecency and pitiless bigotry were too many to give charity a loophole.

"I will say this for Mr. Levi's benefit," I went on. "I don't want to drive the workers down to a subsistence level, and I gave Mr. Levi no excuse for thinking that I do. I merely pointed out that the mass of working-class earnings gave a surplus over subsistence. This is no consolation to those who are beneath the subsistence level. Our material advance still leaves a great deal to be desired, and I want it to continue. But, although it is very natural for the undernourished to think there must be some quick, painless and infallible way of killing the giant poverty, that is not so. Giants don't die easily. A free economy has abolished starvation and continues steadily to raise the material standards of life. I admit that it is not enough, but when you look back at the earlier world and look round at most of the world of to-day, it is much. Those who believe that a planned economy will accelerate this rise and maintain it must prove, not merely that a planned economy will arrange a different distribution, but that it will secure a rising production. I must hark back to the analogy of disarmament. The perfectionists who thought peace was something you could buy in a shop were able to make a very powerful appeal by pointing out the waste, cruelty and futility of war. But they found in time that the price of avoiding war was subjection to slavery, and found it out so late that we very nearly had to pay the price of war by fighting and also the price of a shameful peace by defeat. Perhaps they won't make the same mistake again, but they aren't being asked

to. They are being asked to make a slightly different mistake, and they *are* making it. They may have learned by experience, but experience, like history, never repeats itself. The same temptation to take the short and easy way is presented in different terms. It is not the terms of the temptation which are repeated, but the weakness of the tempted which reasserts itself. That a free economy works badly I will admit, because it is worked by fallible and selfish human beings, but I say again that it will work better than any other economy, and common sense is on my side."

Mr. Levi looked at me with a cold eye.

"You seem to think it a wonderful thing," he said, "that in a country where there are the most shocking contrasts of wealth and poverty nobody should drop dead of starvation."

"Not wonderful," I interrupted, "but certainly unusual. If people who swill and guzzle at a Lord Mayor's banquet can feel that nobody outside is in the last extremity of want, it is not a great deal to say, but it is more than can be said for Moscow. I don't expect this argument to appeal to the undernourished—for example, to the wife of a postman who has stolen a letter, been dismissed and had his pension rights taken away by a State monopoly, or to the wife of a miner in the years of depression. Naturally, they will be tempted to believe there is an easy and simple way of giving justice to all. They will believe that the mark of our economy is destitution, but, in fact, the mark of our economy is a relative absence of thorough destitution. The reality will inevitably escape the sufferers. A distinguishing mark of Victorian Britain was a remarkable freedom from large-scale bloodshed. That fact would not appeal to a woman who had lost a husband and a son in the Mutiny or the Crimean War, but it would remain a fact."

"Let's get back from the Crimea," said Mr. Levi scornfully. "Supposing there has been some advance in general standards in the last fifty years or so—a miserable advance—was it free enterprise that caused it? What about the Trade Unions and the class-struggle of the workers? Don't tell me that kind-hearted bosses paid a bit more every year out of the kindness of their hearts. Every penny was squeezed out of them. It was the demands of organised labour that did the trick."

"Hear, hear," said Mr. Gudgeon piously.

"But the demands of organised or unorganised labour are an essential part of free enterprise," I objected. "Bargaining is the essence of the system. Employers are no better, if no worse, than other men. They are very apt to be blinded by the bigotry of self-interest. They will not only take an unfair advantage, but they will tell themselves that it is quite fair. Not all will do this, because not all men succumb to the particular temptations of their state, but many will. The Industrial Revolution showed human nature in a very bad light."

"Why?" asked Mr. Slattery quietly.

"Because it was a Revolution," I answered, "and revolutions usually show human nature in a bad light—they put power into striving, unscrupulous and unaccustomed hands. If the Revolution establishes itself, that power is very nearly absolute, and at the same time it is insecure. The results are terrible. The Industrial Revolution was like any other revolution. It has outlived its days of vile and violent sin, but the stain of these sins is with us yet, and so are the effects of those sins."

"If there had been planning——" Mr. Gudgeon began.

"But it was a revolution against economic planning," I said. "It rose with the collapse of a planned economy. If it had been a much more gradual process, the results would have been very much better."

"Are you trying to tell us," said Mr. Slattery, "that the horrors of the time were simply the fruits of the sins of a number of Bad Men, who sent their sons to public schools so that they were rather better men and behaved rather more nicely? Why were the men bad?"

"For a number of reasons," I answered. "For one thing, they were men surrounded with new temptations and nothing in their experience had given them an immediately applicable code of principles to combat the temptations. Anyway, they weren't all bad men in the copy-book sense. Some of them thought very highly of themselves, and not without reason. They were industrious, courageous, intelligent, frugal and enterprising. They were proud of these qualities, and not unjustly. Where they erred deeply was in not realising that they had much to be ashamed of. The workers who were not frugal, not endlessly industrious and not enterprising they regarded as morally unworthy."

"But there were better men than these among the manufacturers. There were men of unimpeachable good will who sweated their workers in spite of this good will. Fielden of Todmorden, for example, is reputed to have spent thirty thousand pounds in support of Shaftesbury, besides making great personal efforts in Factory Act 'propaganda'; but he actually increased the hours in his own mills while he was struggling for a Ten Hour Day. He did this because he was convinced that a factory working short hours could not compete with a factory working long hours. Robert Owen proved that was false, but Fielden believed that only the intervention of the State could protect himself and his workers from the overwhelming competition of sweated labour. Sir James Graham was a man of very decent sincerity and good feeling, but he opposed the Ten Hours agitation because he believed that the lot of the great mass of people would always be bare and miserable. He didn't enjoy this thought, any more than some of our decent-minded planners of to-day enjoy all the concomitants of their planning; but, like them, he thought the evil was 'inevitable.' After factory hours had been shortened, Graham made a frank confession that events had surprised him, and he had been proved wrong. Our planners may have to confess some day that they also have been proved wrong, but the confession will give pleasure to nobody. And for those who say how much more decent the Industrial Revolution would have been if it had been planned, it is well to remember that it would have been planned by men like Graham, men who believed that long hours were a painful necessity, as to-day so many believe that industrial slavery is a painful necessity."

"I suppose you believe that the waste, the confusion, the chaos of competitive industry are a painful necessity," said Mr. Gudgeon drily.

"I don't know what you mean by chaos," I answered. "Nor do I know what you mean by waste. There is a huge waste in fern seeds, but, in spite of that, or because of that, the fern is a most flourishing plant. I think when you use such words as 'waste' and 'chaos,' you are understanding words in one sense and applying them in another. What you would call chaos in industry and commerce is, economically, the mark of organic growth and life. There is 'chaos' under the ground where

plants grow, but the chaos is adjustment to environment and the condition of growth. It was H. G. Wells who popularised the idea that the cross-currents, the fluctuations, the rises and failures of economic life were chaos and 'grey confusion'. He taught us that economic life should be as neat and tidy and static as a scientific laboratory. But it is a notable fact that in Wells's romantic and sentimental picture of the young scientist thinking things out at his laboratory bench, the bench is orderly and the instruments very precise, but the mind and soul of the young scientist are a most calamitous muddle. His experiments in life are of a most fumbling and disorderly nature, and his conclusions are a grey confusion. That is very natural, for the young scientist is alive and the instruments are dead ; but it doesn't seem that this distinction was ever very clear in Mr. Wells's mind. His picture of a highly scientific world is one in which every means of living is neatly ordered, and the men and women are moral anarchists. It is a world in which the trains are always in time and the passengers always late.

"It is not chaos in Nature when a branch withers and falls off the tree. It is not chaos when the leaves fall off in winter. It is a principle of life. I can remember coming across a broken-down and most dejected-looking cottage in a Highland glen and being saddened by the thought of the extinguished hearth and the dismal evidence of decay. But I was considerably cheered up when I went round the corner and saw a new and prosperous cottage with the hearth well ablaze. The broken-down cottage was no more waste, ruin and chaos than the sloughed skin of a snake is waste, ruin and chaos."

"Is there no ruin in the Highlands?" asked Mr. Slattery. "Are there no empty cottages and empty glens?"

"There are," I answered. "A tragic number of them. But that is a result of scientific direction of labour and a paternalism that was cruel to be kind. The MacNab of the Clearances was a Planner. The Sutherland Clearances were done with the best bureaucratic intentions, and with no fine regard for the prejudices of a reactionary and stubborn peasantry."

Mr. Slattery shook his head and said a rude word.

"You have talked all night," he went on, "as if the Economic Man was the final product of the law and the prophets. To hell with the Economic Man. To hell with economics."



"To hell with them," I said agreeably. "That's Okay by me. I only say that if you wish to take certain action for uneconomic motives, you must not pretend that your motives are economic. You must not undertake certain activities on the ground that they will increase production when, in fact, they will reduce production. You must know what you are doing. Economic interests are not supreme, and if you can break the contemporary obsession with material comfort, you will have done a good job. But you won't break the economic obsession by talking bad economics."

"Tell that to the workers," said Mr. Levi.

"I'm telling it to you," I answered. "Allowing that we may have to interfere in industry for human reasons, because men are not fern seeds, and reduce the strength of economic tendencies, let the law do so by telling men what not to do with their own business, and not by doing their business for them. What is contemptuously called the negative state is the free state, because free enterprise is an activity of free will. When men exercise free will much evil will be done, and it is possible that some of that evil might be prevented in a servile state. But it has been the European faith and experience that, on balance, the benefits of free will far outweigh the benefits of the most enlightened tyranny. Whoever argues for comprehensive planning argues for the surrender of personal initiative. However honest and selfless he may be, I believe he is undermining the foundations of the civilisation that made him."

"To hell with the civilisation that made me," said Mr. Levi.

"Do you quite mean that?" I asked him.

He looked at me with hard and angry eyes.

"Yes," said Mr. Levi.

## Chapter Four

### THE COMMON MAN

“YOUR mind is sordid,” said Mr. Slattery. He said it good-humouredly, but with conviction.

“Why is it sordid?” I asked him. I knew that nothing I could say in my defence would have any serious effect on Mr. Slattery, because his attitude to the material world is aloof and uninquisitive. He would be pleased to see all men enjoying a sufficiency of material goods, but he does not think that this sufficiency is the clue to happiness. Hunger and insufficiency may destroy happiness, but the full belly and ample means do not create it. This is something which Mr. Slattery knows and Mr. Levi does not know, but because he regards the benefits of material plenty with a rather sceptical eye, he is inclined to think that plenty is easily achieved—and then forgotten about. This is an error, but not one of which he will ever be convinced. He calls me sordid because I insist on talking about economics when I am talking about economics. When someone says that a steel works is productive and a school is also productive, I cannot let this confusion of thought escape. Mr. Slattery therefore thinks that I regard a steelworks as being more important than a school, whereas I mean only that a school is not productive.

“Your mind is sordid,” he said, “because you are satisfied with a greedy, competitive jungle state of selfish struggling. You think that this gross condition of economic tussling will provide a sufficiency of goods, and that is enough for you. You don’t or won’t see how much life is degraded by being taken on these terms.”

“I quite agree,” said Mr. Levi. “Get rid of the profit-motive and you will lessen the stranglehold on full production for use.”

“You disagree profoundly with Mr. Slattery,” I objected. “He dislikes this emphasis on production. So do I. I have merely argued that self-reliance, which Mr. Slattery calls selfishness, personal initiative and responsibility and control by people who know what they are doing provide the only way of securing a realistic economy and encouraging the development of responsible citizens, so far as economic activity has an effect on

citizenship. Mr. Slattery is inclined to think that free enterprise is immoral in its tendency and you are very certain that it is. You also believe, or want to believe, that it is uneconomic. I believe that it is economic and also that it is moral in its tendency because it is free. So far I have only been arguing the economic case. Unlike you, I don't think it is all-important, and, unlike Mr. Slattery, I don't think it is to be despised."

"We've heard that before," said Mr. Slattery, "but it won't do. You can't consider economic facts in isolation. Ruskin disposed of that. Perhaps you remember where he replied to the writers who take pure economic considerations first, and then propose to allow weight to other considerations afterwards. He says this is a convenient method, as it would also be convenient for a teacher of gymnastics to remove the bones from his pupils, to begin with. He could then roll them into balls or stretch them out into long strings; but he would find some difficulty in putting the bones back afterwards."

I had to acknowledge that there was force in this, but I maintained that the dangers of this method were much less than the dangers of the confused approach, when you put forward dubious economic arguments to justify dubious social or political ambitions. If, for example, people would agree never to say that expenditure was "productive," when they meant only that it was socially advantageous, then we would know what we were doing, and perhaps not do it.

"For example?" said Mr. Levi.

"For example, armaments and roads," I replied. "In the years of trade depression——"

"What caused the depression?" asked Mr. Levi triumphantly.

"A variety of causes," I answered, "none of which State control or ownership of industry could possibly cure. But one very notable contributory cause was Planning—Planning in foreign countries, it is true, by means of high tariffs, subsidies and other devices of a controlled economy, but Planning all the same."

"Pah!" said Mr. Levi.

"Pah to you!" I answered agreeably. "To return to the point. In the days of trade depression, there was much discussion as to ways and means of providing employment. Roads were a favourite suggestion, because expenditure on roads was said to

be productive. In fact, roads were built to absorb idle labour, but this very proper purpose was disguised as a productive enterprise. There is no doubt that roads have an economic value, but all roads don't have the same value, and it is more than doubtful if all the roads built, and most particularly all the roads whose building was strongly urged, could be regarded as economic at all. That is to say, their economic benefit, while not invisible, was much less than the cost. In other words, the result wasn't worth the trouble, economically. On the other hand, road-making didn't prove to be a very satisfactory method of absorbing labour, for it did little or nothing for those who were worst hit by depression—the skilled workers in trades exposed to world price-levels. Each of the objects of the ambitious road-building programme, looked at steadily and singly, was unsatisfactory ; but the mind jumped from one to the other and took the blurred picture of social-economic advantage as satisfactory without any desire to examine the matter closely and accurately. How different was the approach to armaments ! ”

“ Rightly so,” said Mr. Gudgeon. “ Armaments are a wanton waste, a result of human folly.”

“ Admittedly they are a result of human folly,” I agreed. “ But so long as mankind remains in a condition of folly, it is double folly not to consider and allow for the results. In any event, the test of waste, which is a profit test, was eagerly applied to armaments, but was not applied with any willingness to roads, and not applied at all to other experiments. How often did we hear enthusiasts for improvements in the social services declaim that this or that reform would only cost the price of a battleship, or perhaps two battleships, or three battleships. You would have thought we were making battleships in the lavish and casual manner of a wealthy young dude buying fancy socks, while we were grudging every penny spent on providing ultra-violet rays and cinemas for nursery schools, and free meals, free clothing, free travelling and free hair-cuts for the older scholars. By the test of economic advantage, building battleships was rather a good way of creating employment, though not, of course, productive ; but, by the test of social advantage, there was an open assumption that battleships were a disgraceful thing to have, an unworthy concession to human vice, like Government brothels. I suggest that this was a mistake, and that in June 1940, we would

gladly have sold all the ultra-violet rays and school cinemas in the country for their price in battleships and other barbaric machines of war."

"Nobody denies that battleships have a military advantage," said Mr. Gudgeon. "But how can you pretend that they have a social advantage? After all, they are waste."

"It is socially advantageous not to lose a war," I answered.

"Oh, if you care to put it that way——" said Mr. Gudgeon.

"If you don't care to put it that way," I answered, "you are in a nice state to repeat the enormous errors of judgment on the possibilities and problems of life which you and your like committed after the last war and which led so surely to this."

"Never mind that," said Mr. Slattery impatiently. "We can't rattle those bones for ever. Come back to your *laissez-faire* principle. I think you are resurrecting the worst form of Victorian self-righteousness. You make it a positive virtue for every man to look after himself."

"So it is," I put in.

"You seem to think there is a Divine Plan by which private selfishness becomes public virtue, and that if we all look after our own interest, then the general interest will look after itself. That is a kind of commercial mysticism which I am unable to accept."

"There is nothing mystical about it," I answered. "'Looking after yourself' does not in the least imply a selfish and greedy attitude. It simply means that you don't surrender your initiative and responsibility to other people. You may be extremely public-spirited and altruistic, but you stand on your own feet—and not on someone else's feet."

"Altruistic!" exclaimed Mr. Levi. "'Where did you ever find altruistic capitalists?'"

"You never found enough of them," I admitted. "But in Victorian England, you found many more men of high character, solid principle and full integrity than you find to-day. We have suffered a gross deterioration, most particularly in politics. No serious man would pretend that our contemporary Socialists were the equal of the older Radicals in qualities of heart or mind or character, and the cause of the deterioration is, I believe, Socialism, the rejection of personal responsibility, individual conscience and private duty. When Canning wrote his *Needy Knife-Grinder*

he meant it as broad farce, but it became a summary of serious doctrine. Any benevolence or act of private justice was denounced, as supporting the evil System—as if the System was a jail in which we lived, and not an expression of our mind and will. However narrow and unimaginative Victorian Britain was, it was certainly more honest and more honourable than our present day. Victorian history is studded with examples of men who went against their party, their tradition and their personal interest when an evil thing was brought home to them. But our age is marked with moral obtuseness among the majority and positive corruption among the Communists. Cobden was a high-spirited and high-principled man, and his economic notions supported his principles. Cobden was right in believing that economic freedom was a favourable condition for virtue, just as any other form of freedom is a favourable condition for virtue. Where he was wrong was in laying too much stress on economic matters. He said once that political economy was the highest exercise of the human intellect. That was an absurdity worthy of a fan of the Dialectic. But he was substantially right in his economic notions, so far as they went. Only, they didn't go so far as he thought."

"Cotton was his God," said Mr. Gudgeon.

"By no means," I said. "But where Cobden did fail was to win proper respect for cotton and steel and coal from their makers and producers. He knew that the significant economic activity of Britain was industrial, and he tried to create a self-respecting industrial class, men of business and public-spirit who would constitute a great 'interest' in public affairs and would bring to Government and the general thought of society the natural contribution of the economically dominant class. His own contribution was narrow and in some respects shallow, but it was respectable and characteristic of his occupations and the native trend of his mind. But he was unable to form an effective body of opinion. The great merchants and manufacturers became moral absentees from the sources of their wealth and influence. They became imitation aristocrats and adopted the customs and habits of mind of the land-owning gentry. Therefore the sons of the wealthy manufacturers became much greater strangers to their workers than their hard-headed and hard-fisted fathers had ever been."

"But surely the conduct of the sons was better," said Mr. Slattery.

"It was better, but it was better in the wrong way," I answered. "They might be readier to admit the claims of justice, but they were much less ready to admit the claims of brotherhood. The sports and habits they took up grew out of the soil and had some social significance in country life, but they did not grow out of the factory or the warehouse. The country squire might be a lordly, haughty and obnoxious person, but he was apt to get dung on his boots, he knew oats from barley, and he had the same taste in sports and the same standards of manly hardiness as the labourers who worked for him. But the gentleman industrialist never had oil on his hands.

"Human beings can stand a lot of injustice and positive hardship," I went on. "What they can't stand is contempt or patronage, however benevolent. They can't stand the pretension that the ordinary man and the superior man are of different clay. Beer drinkers don't object to champagne drinkers, but they do object to Prohibitionists."

"Do they?" asked Mr. Slattery.

"Not to all of them," I amended. "They don't object at all to the Salvation Army type of Prohibitionist, the zealous lass who tries to rescue them. They don't want to be rescued, and, in fact, they are not rescued, but they think it's rather nice and friendly of the girl to try. On the other hand, they object very strongly to the Insurance type of Prohibitionist—the superior man, not raising his fellow men, but commanding him to rise. People don't mind being rescued, but they hate like hell to be improved. That's why the workers didn't much appreciate the benevolent efforts of employers who didn't know their faces or their names."

"Do you suggest that a psychological unity between industrial workers and their bosses would have solved the social problem?" asked Mr. Slattery.

"No," I answered. "That alone wouldn't have solved the problem, but, without that, no other improvement would. It was said in Victorian times that some of the best Irish landlords were among the absentees. That may have been true, so far as rents and improvements went, but absentee landlords are always the worst. The resident landlord may be grasping, but the

tenants can see who is grasping and they know why. They can hate him heartily ; he is at least there to hate. But the absentee landlord will be hated worse, for, however good he may be to his tenants, they are not good enough for him."

"Just like India," said Mr. Chatterjee softly, again.

"All you're doing," said Mr. Levi, "is illustrating the Dialectic. Things were that way because they had to be. Now the workers know that they have to rely on themselves. Their only hope is their own unity, all over the world."

"The unity of the workers all over the world is a proved and undeniable myth," I said. "But the unity of the workers in any one country is no less mythical. The profoundest and most disastrous social estrangement of the industrial society is not between worker and employer, but between worker and worker."

"The future lies with the Common Man," said Mr. Levi. "The Common Men all over the world are beginning to realise that they must take things in hand and run the economic and social system by themselves and for themselves."

"What is the Common Man ?" asked Mr. Slattery.

Mr. Levi gestured vaguely.

"Everybody knows," he answered.

"Nobody knows," I said. "The working class believe that the Common Man is a working man, trampled on and despised, but having all the rich and warm qualities of heart and mind which have withered among the great ones of the earth. But the suburban middle-class believe that the Common Man wears a bowler hat, digs his garden in the evenings and has a third-class season on the district railway ; he is a man of simple and democratic instincts, but of considerable shrewdness and information ; he answers to all the trumpet calls of *Picture-Post* and readily grasps the point of the most fatuous Low cartoon. The intellectuals believe that they are a finer version of the Common Man, and an example of what the Common Man can become, in the teeth of difficulties, and of what all Common Men will become when the difficulties are removed."

"The Common Man is the Proletariat," said Mr. Levi.

"Nothing of the kind," said Mr. Slattery. "The Common Man is a middle-class conception. The Common Man is the man without privilege of birth. Thackeray's Osborne, was a man of great wealth, but he regarded himself



as a Common Man whenever he was snubbed by the aristocracy."

"There is no such thing as the proletariat," said Mr. Baldero.

I had to disagree with that pronouncement. I knew what Mr. Baldero was driving at, but he was ignoring important facts. I thought that a wrangling argument, with constant interruptions and the disposal of irrelevancies, would leave the matter as cloudy as ever, so I offered to read a little study I had composed on this subject. Mr. Slattery seemed willing enough to give me a critical hearing, and Mr. Baldero was happy to think that while I was reading, Mr. Levi could not be talking. That was a sufficient support to encourage me, so I offered them these tentative and imperfect reflections.

## II

### THE EMERGING PROLETARIAT

The Proletariat is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as "The class of wage-earners who have no reserve or capital ; sometimes extended to include all wage-earners ; working men."

This definition might give us a solid and useful category if we lived in a stable economic system, but we live in a very fluid system. In every generation many thousands of the proletariat accumulate reserves or cease to be wage-earners and so move themselves out of the classification. A smaller number lose their reserves, or become wage-earners, and so sink into the group.

One of the most remarkable results of the free economic system has been the enormous growth of the lower middle-class. Not only have countless single persons raised themselves economically, but whole occupations have assumed a lower middle-class tinge and status. It is this process of individual and mass exfoliation which makes the "solidarity of the proletariat" an idle phrase. You cannot have solidarity in a body which a large number of the members are trying very anxiously to leave. Nothing caused greater bitterness during the miserable depression years than the loss of status of some of the skilled trades. Engineers had to put up with bad wages and extreme uncertainty of employment, while men in sheltered occupations, municipal dustmen and tram-drivers, enjoyed better terms and security. The trained engineer found himself sinking back into the proletariat, and,

although he voted Socialist, very naturally, all that politics could do for him was to increase the comfort of the sheltered occupations, which were directly under political control. In political sentiment, the tram-driver might be the engineer's brother ; in economic reality, he was the engineer's successful and privileged rival.

Political action gave impetus to a new economic development. The engineer had, in his skill, something which he believed to be the equivalent of capital, but he found that invention had reduced its intrinsic value or, rather, the extent of the demand, and that political action had reduced it still further. (This may possibly explain why the A.E.U. has such a low proportion of members paying the political levy.) A sense of frustration and resentment developed, which was socially evil, and damaging to the theoretical unity of the working-class.

The skilled man felt resentment, because he believed he enjoyed a moral superiority over the unskilled worker. He had, and he still has, a strong dose of the Victorian capitalist ideology. For the working man to acquire a small amount of financial capital, prudence, abstinence and industry are demanded. The same qualities are demanded, to some degree, in apprenticeship. The intending engineer went to night school and worked for an almost invisible wage, while his more happy-go-lucky contemporaries had their evenings free and earned much more than he did, by some unskilled work. The reward of his virtue was the eventual higher wage and the greater security of a tradesman, plus the greater esteem, which was very important. The developments which robbed his skill of its value angered him as much as a financial development angers the small middle-class man who finds that his frugal savings in the bank or the public funds have been devalued. Not only did he suffer from a very tangible misfortune, but his morality was mocked and his view of life was invalidated.

It might be argued that the real dividing line which separates the Two Nations is between the provident and the improvident. A multiplicity of social factors obscures this division among the middle and the upper classes, but it is very clear among the workers. The division is between those who will make some effort and sacrifice to get out of the economic proletariat, and those who will not. The provident put their children to a job

which promises future security, the improvident put them to jobs which yield an immediate return. The provident will make sacrifices to put a clever daughter on to be a teacher or a nurse, but the improvident will be hostile to such ambitions, or indifferent.

The small number of children from working class homes who go through secondary schools has been advanced as proof that there is no real opportunity for the children of the poor; the children are taken away from school at the earliest age because poverty demands it. Practical experience does not fully bear this theory out. It is not clear that children of unskilled workers who remain at school are any better off than the children who leave. The parents of early leavers sometimes remove their children because poverty gives them no option, and sometimes because they are positively hostile to the idea of further education and social advancement. But the more general response is negative. The father says, "Johnny can stay at school if he wants to. I won't stand in his way." The usual result of this is that Johnny leaves promptly or, if he stays, he is aware that the way-out from school discipline is always open, and so works half-heartedly, if at all.

It is easy but unfair to blame the parent who does not push his child through to a higher education and a different way of life. The educated youth becomes a stranger in an unlettered family. His language is different, his values are different and his social habits insensibly change. His father's house, his income, his table manners, his accent, his amusements, his intellectual level, his companions are "not good enough" for the middle-class son. Family affection and gratitude may overcome great difficulties, but, in some degree, the son becomes a stranger, and something of family intimacy is irretrievably lost. Often enough, there is irritation and resentment on both sides. The parents are unintelligently hostile to the son's wider interests and the son ungraciously exasperated by the intellectual or social shortcomings of the parents. It is very maddening for a not particularly magnanimous person of some education to have to suffer the senseless reiterations, the pointless questions, the crudity and inaccuracy of expression and the logical emptiness of uneducated conversation. It is equally maddening for the uneducated person to be confronted with intellectual standards he has never

wanted to accept, and to be hustled about and querulously rebuked by his own child because he does not conform.

These difficulties are not permitted to weigh with ambitious parents, and, indeed, they are not so heavy for them, for the ambitious parent usually has a good degree of natural intelligence. But they do weigh with the others, and the vexations which often follow when a clever child goes far beyond his parents in mental training are symbolic of what happens to all the activities of the genuine proletariat.

To be truly and genuinely of the proletariat is not to have a certain level of income or deficiency of capital or to practice certain occupations ; it is to have a certain habit of mind and a certain cast of character. After a century and more of social sifting and movement, it is a reasonable assumption that natural selection has done some effective separation. With wide allowances for accidental circumstances, such as immigration, it may be assumed that an increasing proportion of the proletariat are people who have remained in the proletarian ranks, not because they can't get out but because they don't sufficiently want to. Their idea of happiness is to be comfortable in the life in which they find themselves, not to climb arduously up to something socially higher. They signify their decision in life by leaving school at fourteen and marrying before they are of age.

The more ambitious of their own social kind sometimes look down on them and so do many of the middle-class, but unfairly. The work of the unskilled or semi-skilled proletariat is socially very necessary, and it is not clear that the cheerful, hardy navvy who spends his extra shillings on beer and betting is a less worthy character than the more ambitious man who scrimps and saves a hundred pounds to buy an insurance book and abandon manual labour for ever. The improvidence of the proletariat, is not necessarily a moral weakness ; it is, in a sense, an anti-Puritan decision. They will make real efforts to keep up their payments to the Prudential, but the larger, long-term saving is something that does not appeal to them. They don't want to be prudent, cautious and stingy all through their youth so that they may open a little shop in middle-age. They want to enjoy life as they know it rather than cramp their nature to get a footing in a different kind of life. They refuse to join the Victorian godly, and will enjoy what cakes and ale may come their way.

## THE DEMOCRAT AT THE SUPPER TABLE

But this refusal makes the psychological proletariat (if I may so describe them) a rather helpless class in a world where a man's private affairs are so deeply affected by public interests. They are helpless because they are unable to produce effective spokesmen and representatives, for you cannot conduct any kind of public business on happy-go-lucky principles. Of all the types which leave the proletariat and assume the bourgeois mentality and morality, much the most interesting is the working-class political representative. Leaving aside remarkable characters of unusual personal gifts, the worker's representative is a man who is almost necessarily divorced from the people he represents, in two ways.

First, he has the cast of mind of the middle-class. Just as much as the man who buys an insurance book, he is a man who wants to get on. He may strive for some degree of education, which the genuine proletariat does not. He is usually a saving type, with some degree of personal prudence and the ability to handle other men's money. Very often he disapproves of gambling, drink and general carelessness, and has much the same admiration for the insurance virtues as the boss-class he is dealing with. All this estranges him profoundly from the cheerful navvy. The industrious apprentice is not the only type of Union and Labour leader, but he is the dominant type, and the others have all something of his character. Keir Hardie once spoke approvingly of a meeting of Labour leaders which was held in Temperance premises, as an open challenge to the Giant Drink, but he also mentioned with some acidity that a large number of the assembled ideologues found it necessary to leave the meeting, from time to time, to visit the pub across the road. There is no doubt that the delinquents more truly represented the workers than Keir Hardie did, but it was Keir Hardie who dominated the Party. In fact, there is no type so hostile, temperamentally, to the proletariat as the petite bourgeoisie, but the leaders of the proletariat *are* petite bourgeoisie. In their view of the possibilities and purpose of life, there was more between Lord Lonsdale and the average miner, than there was between the miner and Keir Hardie or Bob Smillie, or even A. J. Cook. But the bourgeois type is the type which emerges. The average Union man who has no genius but only competence and dependability can no more help becoming a bourgeois than a tadpole can help becoming

a frog. But it is a fact and a serious social disadvantage that he ceases to share the proletarian view of life.

The second cause of estrangement is rather more difficult to explain. The leader ceases to live in the same mental world as the worker. He has to make some attempt to think in a co-ordinated and articulate way. In the critical days of the war, he was not able to say that Russia must have every possible aid and at the same time say that the workers must go on strike over some demarcation dispute. The workers did not *say* this either, but they felt that way, and sometimes acted accordingly. They did so because the decisions of simple people are made largely by instinct and emotional reaction. They will passionately maintain two contradictory convictions and will never dream of putting them together. When somebody does put them together and shows that they cannot both be maintained, the simple people become as angry as Goldsmith did when he was told he could not move his upper jaw.

It is not to be imagined that educated people live entirely by logic. Only too often education is a means by which a man recognises a contradiction in his beliefs and, at the same time, finds a glib form of words to disguise it. But there are some things which cannot be publicly argued, though they can be privately held. It is not possible for a public man to denounce racial prejudice and offer incense to the religion of humanity and, at the same time, adopt a hostile attitude to Jews or Irish or Welsh or Negroes, but it is very easy for a private man to behave in that way. It is not possible for a public man to uphold the sacred solidarity of the workers and at the same time insist that unskilled workers 'or women must have an inferior value put on their work ; but the men who elected him are not troubled by the logical dilemma. It is not possible for a public man to demand full employment and reject direction of labour, but the labourers will demand the one and reject the other—or try to.

The public men representing any great interest must take a wider view and give their adherence to more general principles than the private member. But it is the misfortune of the proletariat that their spokesmen must, or do, adopt general principles which run counter to the private interests and prejudices of the ordinary Union member or Labour voter. Thus, the Socialist armaments worker in Woolwich was called upon to vote for

Socialism, in the person of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, the disarmament pacifist. Thus, the craft unions at the outbreak of the war, found themselves pledged to a political decision on wages which proved, to put it mildly, unpopular, and did enormous damage to the Unions.

There is no reason to doubt that the workers of Barrow-in-Furness admired the Russian defiance of Germany as deeply as the workers of any other industrial town or that they felt equally bound by proletarian duty to assist the republic of the common man. This loyalty and enthusiasm were logically turned against them when they ran their remarkable strike, but they did not respond in the manner of a defeated debater by conceding the point and going back to work. They chalked, "Shoot Stalin" on the factory walls and went on with the strike. Their solidarity with the Russian worker was an extension of their solidarity with each other, and when the extension was counter to the real, central and instinctive thing, it lost all its rather meagre force. The man who went to work during the strike was undeniably a faithful servant of the best and largest interests of international brotherhood, but he was also a blackleg, and his fellows hooted him down the street. No doubt he pleased Mr. Jack Tanner, but Mr. Tanner, in putting logic before instinct and political before personal considerations, had lost contact with his followers.

Mr. Tanner's case is typical. Whatever political or social form the proletariat create becomes foreign to their instincts, simply because it is a form, something articulated and logically disposed, which gives the primacy to general considerations instead of to instinctive reactions. Whatever action the leaders adopt must be capable of defence in speech and on paper, but that is not how the minds of simple people work. An unsuccessful Labour candidate once said that the average voter had the mind of a fourth standard pupil; he thought in pictures. This is more true of the authentic proletarian than of any other group, for they have the largest proportion of people of low education and high, natural emotional response. Even the deeply effective type of education by the discipline of a clearly defined position in society and by the conditions of daily work is largely denied to them.

Take, by way of contrast, the medical profession. Many of them have a very imperfect general education and intellectual

interests of very mediocre quality, but the responsibilities and demands of their work, and also their corporate responsibilities and status as a profession, force a certain discipline on them in their behaviour and their claims as doctors, singly and in a body. Many doctors, in their private minds and casual speech, object to the new medical schemes for selfish reasons which they would never advance in public or allow their spokesmen to advance, because they know that such claims would damage their standing and effective hold on public opinion. Therefore, they expect their leaders to take a more altruistic and public-spirited stand, and if that stand has disadvantageous results in some respects, they will accept these results, though not cheerfully, rather than disown their own leaders and the consequences of their own policy. They will not stage Porter Award strikes against their own negotiators, because they know that such anarchy will destroy their position in society.

On the other hand, the miners have acted emotionally because they feel that they have no position in society to lose. Therefore, damage to the authority of their leaders is something they take too lightly, and loyalty to the political commitments their leaders have undertaken in their name and with their consent is something they hardly take seriously at all. Their political loyalty is to vote solidly against the owner's candidate, and their proletarian loyalty is to hang on to the last gasp in a strike. No wage increases will bring the miners round, because they are not greedy for money. What they want is a place in society and a communal recognition of the dignity and value of their toil. They translate this into terms of nationalisation, with workers' control. But their methods of expressing this desire have been as damaging as could well be imagined. A little cool thought would make this clear to them. But they are not good at cool thought. They think in pictures, and the picture of the coal owner comes through every other. They lack the discipline imposed by a secure social recognition, responsibilities and rights, and, lacking the discipline, they lack understanding of the means to the end they desire.

The amorphous nature of the proletariat state has not been improved by persistent Socialist preaching of a quite fictitious class unity and common economic interest among all men who work with their hands. The driver of an express may have



strong views on the rights of the workers, but he will let his spokesmen down with a bump if they fail to insist that his rights are on a much higher level than the rights of a carriage cleaner. Industrially, he is all for class distinction based on skill and training and responsibility, *i.e.*, based on the elements favourable to himself. But his Union is politically attached to a party, which, by its philosophy and its need for votes, inclines to political action which flattens out class differences. Inside the party, the weight of numbers conceals the weight of a special social contribution and nullifies the effect of economic development. If economic development were not counteracted, the engine driver, the machine-tool maker and many another skilled worker would be above the need for social security, would have an independent voice in his own affairs and would be able to make his weight felt, as the doctor can, by virtue of the intrinsic worth of his social contribution.

It is not to be doubted that men who established or are establishing "a stake in the country" will not be anxious to exchange this for a position of total dependence on political largesse and authority. Yet, the tendency of our social policy is to extend the area of the proletariat broadly, and irresistibly—so far.

It is in the political field that the economically weak or helpless come into their own. Their needs and demands are a force, though not the only one, behind the rapid widening of the range of political interference. All social and economic activities threaten soon to be under direct State control or close State supervision. Economic benefits, responsibilities and duties, outside the wage structure and the field of contract are being steadily increased, and these are based on the imagined interests and needs of the genuine proletariat who are the weakest, and, at the same time, the largest single group. The peculiar conditions of this group are assumed to apply to all. Because some are not able to save enough by personal thrift to meet even normal calamities, there is a general regimentation and impounding of resources which force many others into the same category—the category from which they have escaped with much effort. A status which is thought to be appropriate to the permanent and resigned proletariat is imposed on all, and the contractual element becomes steadily less important in the average man's economics and social life.

According to the Beveridge scheme, he must pay the uniform social insurance premium, regardless of whether he needs the benefits or wants them. So far, he is not positively compelled to accept such kindnesses as a compulsory operation, but it is thought, and intended, that, in time, the recusant will not be able to pay his tax and also adopt alternative services at his private expense ; for the effect of our new social system will be to wipe out, or freeze out, the alternatives.

When a man is compelled to keep his children at school till they are sixteen and is denied the final say in what they will be taught or who will teach them ; when he is compelled to go where he is sent for work and to take what job is assigned to him ; when he is compelled to submit to the treatment of doctors not employed by himself ; when he is forbidden to sue for, or accept capital sums in place of weekly payments, but is compelled to allow suits to be taken in his name without his authority, and even against his will, as if he were a legal minor ; when his compulsory savings are handled by the State because it is assumed that he is not fit to handle them himself ; then it may fairly be said that the retreat from contract to status is well under way. He is being treated as if he were not merely economically, but also morally and mentally incapable of looking after himself.

No benefits can conceal that degradation ; no benefits should weigh against it. The denial of personal responsibility and liberty will stifle what has been the strongest incentive among the poorest to practice abstinence and thrift and to lift themselves a little on the economic scale. The most urgent ambition among industrious and struggling people is not to enjoy luxury, but to enjoy independence. When they call in a doctor, they want to be able to pay him. They want to be above free clothing and meals for their children, and, if there is a better school than the ordinary in the neighbourhood, they will save to send their children there. They are deeply resentful of compulsion and supervision, and will make life-long efforts to avoid these things. Many of them go into jobs with low wages because they have the compensation of permanent employment. Others, in more erratic employment, make the most of good times by cool-headed savings, and, in bad times, will go without small comforts before they go without the deeper comfort of putting something in the bank every week.

The same spirit is even stronger among the petite bourgeoisie, small shopkeepers and clerks. They cling with positive desperation to their achievements in personal independence and pride. Over all of them now hangs the shadow of the proletarian status. The social insurance premiums will severely curb the savings of the lower-paid, income-tax will hit the slightly more comfortable, and all will be treated as if they were incapable of thrift and personal prudence. They may try to preserve a dwindling independence, but the social pressure will be too great for them. They will be disheartened and tempted, and, just as the recusant Catholics slowly fell away under the weight of positive laws and indirect penalties and pressures, they will become tired of the effort to keep two securities going, their own and what the State ordains. The process may be seen, in a modified form, in the decay of the voluntary schools: Many have already disappeared and those which have remained are in a worsening position. After a hard struggle in Parliament, they have been granted such conditions as will permit them to survive with great and growing difficulty; but the economic demands which are half-choking them now may be increased at any time to a point beyond bearing. Indeed, the best hope that they will not be so increased is the distinct possibility that the whole economic system may choke first.

It is surely an evil of some magnitude that the economic system should be so manipulated as to push the lower middle-class and the rising working-class down to a proletarian level, and that the law should impose the proletarian status. It is not suggested that the actual and potential petite bourgeoisie are compact of all the virtues, but they do have the virtues of abstinence, thrift, modest ambition, self-respect and a sense of personal responsibility; and these are virtues not to be despised. These are the people from whom have come the types without which a commercial economy could not be conducted. They made general education possible by providing the necessary public opinion and demand. In the same way, they made Public Health possible. They have fought the Giants Ignorance, Disease, Poverty and the rest, single-handed and with success.

They will now be called upon to fall in line, take their rations and obey instructions. Their lives will be governed by regulations and impositions having no relevance to their own situation, but

designed to relieve economic difficulties from which they have escaped. It is not likely that their children and their children's children will continue to practice hard virtues which have lost their point and purpose. It is not likely that the State will gain in vigour and competence from the decay of these virtues.

There is, of course, a large number of workers who stand to gain financially by the benefits of the Beveridge and kindred schemes. These are the workers who are always under the modern subsistence level, and the larger group who are under it at certain periods of their lives. Either their work is badly paid, or it exhausts them early, or they have not the temperament to save for long-term purposes. They will find the payments onerous, but, none the less, they will draw out much more than they pay in. They claim that they have a right to a living wage (and the State should assist them to secure that right), but the Beveridge plan does not confer rights, except for such consolations as State funerals. The major benefits are conditional (except for family allowances, which are unconditional but will not remain so). The State will supply unemployment benefit, if the worker will accept industrial conscription. The State will ensure against industrial accidents, if the worker surrenders his right to seek private redress. The State will provide a full medical service, in time, if the worker puts himself totally in the hands of the State's medical servants. The State will provide free education at the price of compulsion and parental surrender.

D. H. Lawrence, with acute prevision, wrote a poem about Auntie (the paternal Government) :

Really, Auntie,  
We're having a pretty thin time,  
But so long as we know that Auntie loves us,  
We'll try to act up sublime.

When Social Security is saddled on the underpaid worker, there is one thing fairly certain. He will remain underpaid. It will be pointed out to him that he is doing very well out of the scheme, and that his wages are only a part of his receipts. He will have many and additional benefits, such as compulsory and frequent medical examinations and school meals for his children, of the highest quality, and tasting like rather warm, damp flannel. His fifteen-year old boy who is drawing whiskers on Napoleon in

his history book is costing perhaps thirty pounds a year in formal education, and as much again in other social endowments. He and his wife may not be able to save, but why should they? Auntie will support them in their declining years and bury them with a reasonable degree of municipal pomp.

Even if the unfortunate minority think the scheme is such a good bargain that a sacrifice of freedom is worth the reward, why should their special needs govern the treatment of all others? It is undoubtedly necessary that diabetics should have a rigorously selected diet, but nobody has yet suggested that all the nation should go on the same diet, to keep the diabetics company. But egalitarian theory insists that this peculiar principle should be applied to social security. It is thought that conditions of life which are humiliating to any man cease to be humiliating if they are applied to all men. It is thought to be unimportant that the Englishman's home is no longer his castle, if the Englishman's castle ceases to be his home. If all classes come under the same tyranny, it is no longer tyranny. They are "all equal," as John Stuart Mill said, but "all slaves."

Perhaps the poorest will benefit materially to such a substantial degree that they will be content with close direction, and perhaps not. They are likely to suffer most from the direction, if the plan is efficiently and scientifically managed. It is customary for politicians to talk as if all ignorance, disease, dirt, squalor, ignorance and poverty were the results of an evil and rapacious economic system. But the experts, amateur and professional, have other views. They think the poor must be firmly handled—for their own good, of course. They believe that large numbers will abuse the provisions of social security if they are given the opportunity, that a lazy and shiftless father of six or seven children, drawing allowances and assistance in kind, will be disinclined to do continuous work. They believe that others, of a sluggish and unenterprising nature, will obstinately refuse to remove themselves from one town to another to comply with labour demand. They believe that others again will practice malingering and refuse salutary treatment, from unwillingness to return to work or from some superstitious objection, Giant Ignorance coming to the aid of Giant Sickness.

The Ministry of Labour knows that there was gross abuse of unemployment relief by married women before the introduction

of the Means Test ; and that the Means Test itself was universally hated, most deeply by those who had never abused the funds. The Ministry of Health knows that "lax certification" was a scandal to bureaucracy, and that large numbers of panel doctors issued certificates on the flimsiest pretexts rather than lose their patients. Obviously, the wider the scope of social security, the wider the scope for abuse ; and the handsomer the benefits, the greater the temptation to enjoy them. The experts are aware of this danger, and that is why the Beveridge plan has so many teeth.

The experts know that the agitation against the Means Test was a very genuine and popular movement. They know that rehabilitation centres were widely unpopular and were called "Slave Camps." They must therefore be gratified, if not surprised, to find a popular movement in favour of a scheme which reinforces and extends the most galling provisions of previous social legislation. But they will not be deceived into thinking that these provisions are consciously accepted ; they are merely unnoticed or ignored. When they come into action, there will be discontent—but the experts mean to be firm. They cannot take firm action by singling out and marking down malingerers and dodgers, for the politicians would never allow that. They can only be firm by applying universal rules and attaching universal suspicion. As the provisions of social security are dictated by the needs of a minority, the application will be dictated by the faults of a much smaller minority.

The picture of Social Security as a kindly father supplying the needs, and hearing the prattling confidences of his docile and trusting children does not accord with the facts of past experience. Social Security is more likely to look like a game-keeper matching the wiles of more or less adept poachers who think it is no sin to take a little of what is, by right, their own. Social Security without pain is possible in a country which has a high level of prosperity and a high labour demand. Social Security with pain is possible in an authoritarian State. We are neither one nor the other.

But, because we are neither one nor the other it is difficult to see how our political system can stand the strain of the new social practices. For if the experts mean to be firm, the politicians mean to keep their seats. When the Ministry has a sufficiency

of properly conditioned doctors, they may be cuffed into tightening up their certification, and made to understand that really careful diagnosis must have a discreet eye on the state of health of the Fund. This new medical outlook will be unpopular with the poor, for they will suffer most from rigorous administration, being most subject to industrial accidents, uncertain employment and sickness. But they are also the people who will find the payments most onerous and will therefore be most tempted to get something back.

Firm Fabian treatment will inevitably cause much suffering, some of it quite wanton. The popularity-hunting M.P.'s who are now loudest in demanding all of Beveridge and more, will be the first to exploit cases of hardship. They will tell of broken-hearted widows callously ordered to find employment, of neurotic men sent back to their work and collapsing, of middle-aged artisans put to utterly unsuitable labour, of married men taken away from their families to be reconditioned, of an occasional sufferer dying as the result of an operation he had protested against, of labour transfers causing unhappiness, infidelity and want, of comprehensive medical compulsions and utterly insufficient medical personnel and accommodation. They will develop these cases for all they are worth, and perhaps for more, and they will assault the competent authority with anger and manly scorn.

But it is not the experts they will attack. The experts would answer coldly that you cannot have security without compulsion, that the State cannot guarantee full employment without authority to put men where it chooses, that mistakes will always be made and that honest men must suffer some inconvenience by the rules which are necessary to fetter the lazy or dishonest few. They would say you can't eat your cake and have it, and that any man who thinks or pretends you can is unfit to be in Parliament.

But the Minister will not say this. He may be worried about the solvency of his Fund, but he will be still more worried about the prospects of his party. Political pressure will be all against solvency and strict handling. The easy way, the vote-catching way, will be to let solvency take care of itself—till the crisis comes. It must be remembered that Social Security will create a huge financial interest, or group of interests, to be fought over.

The old age pensioners alone are a large and terrifying growing body who will have no active, personal interest in politics except the defence and extension of their own benefits. What party will choose to offend them?

What party will choose to implement the financial White Paper's recommendations of a variable premium, in a scientific and objective way? The White Paper suggests that, in times of difficulty, the premium should be lowered, and, in times of prosperity, should be increased. It is safe to say that the most gratifying and irrefutable evidence of prosperity will not be sufficient to cause a rise of the premium in an election year. On all hands, public pressure will be against a scientific administration. The experts will be shocked and will talk of Poplarism, but the politicians will remember that, though old George Lansbury was roughly handled in the Commons for his loose and lavish finance and was disowned by his own party, the people in Poplar thought none the worse of him for having a good try at getting them something "decent."

The experts are very likely to lose all the early rounds, but they will come out stronger as the struggle goes on, for they will have the facts on their side. If the weak, the ailing and the aged have a mortgage on the national income, only the most careful management will avert bankruptcy. When bankruptcy comes or threatens, the politicians and the people will have to resign themselves to the facts, and to the experts. The experts (or the men behind the experts), will take over the liabilities of Poplarism on their own terms, and their terms will be authoritarian. A frightened public will accept them. Parliament will, of course, remain, but in many vital matters the decision will no longer lie there. There may be no sudden change; after all, it was not in any dramatic way that the Royal Assent became a formality.

This picture is not very enlivening, but it looks uncommonly plausible. Unless there is a strong revival of the spirit of liberty and responsibility, political control is certain to become a shadow. A nation of clients is not a nation of democrats, and people who have voted themselves to be unfit for the free use of their own wages and savings cannot long resist the conclusion that they are hardly fit for the free use of their own votes. Already, a measure raising the school age has passed through Parliament by agreement of the parties, though nobody pretends that it is not



unpopular among the people it affects. One honourable member took credit for herself because she was bravely voting for a measure she knew her constituents were opposed to. There will be many more measures of the same kind.

It is not a state of affairs which is worthy of our people. Prejudice apart, it is difficult to believe that anywhere in the world there are simple people of more admirable natural virtues than our own. Our people are quite simply good ; patient in adversity, endlessly enduring in danger and hardship, equable and modest in success, generous, cheerful and loyal, free from envy and the other dark passions, friendly, forbearing, not anxious to press an advantage, innocent of pride, and willing to be honest with the world. It is a shame that such men and women should have their own docility and patience turned against them and should be trapped by their profound intellectual vice, a refusal to face the consequences of their actions till these fall upon them. They have willed, or consented to an end, but have not willed, and perhaps will not consent to, the inescapable means.

Perhaps they will consent. It has long been said that the people of Britain never knew their rights ; it may be, now, that they no longer know their wrongs. But, if they accept the client state which is being framed for them, they will discover that only their dependence is assured. Their prosperity and security will still have to be earned, and earned by themselves, while others control them, give them orders, adjudicate on their most personal affairs, and allow them a reward, not proportioned to the value of their labour, but to the strength of the political claim of the client group they belong to—until political claims are discarded, and the complex, omnipotent State is administered by the few whose power was first made by the many, but who will rule by the final mandate of economic and social logic and needs, and the vote itself becomes a thin and feeble thing incapable of shaping the course of the great State machine, to which all will become servants, bound to the necessities of the machine, because the machine itself is bound to its own necessities ; no one will be free, not even the masters. If this bad prospect is to be averted, it will not be enough to call a halt in social developments. It will be necessary to reverse the present trends, and that will not be done unless the people make a most uncharacteristic effort of the mind and will. We are already half-conditioned to

submissions that would have startled our fathers, and the State machine is creating an appropriate frame of mind as it develops. A sluggish and lethargic servitude has its compensations. Whether they will be enduring compensations is another matter, but late regrets will be useless. It is now or never for the people to claim the dignity and the responsibility of free men.

## Chapter Five

### ARTS AND CRAFTS

“**T**HAT stuff,” said Mr. Levi, “is dope. I mean, you’re trying to explain a great historic fact without regard to the great historic process. Of course there is a proletariat. Marx explained that long ago. The development is inevitable.”

“You think my explanations are shallow,” I suggested.

“Yes,” said Mr. Levi. “They’re bourgeois, they’re sentimental.”

“Is it merely sentimental to say that workers’ earnings have steadily increased when Marx said they would decrease?” I asked him. “Is it sentimental to point out that British small savings run into several thousand million pounds?”

“What about the millions who haven’t a farthing?” Mr. Levi retorted. “Aren’t they just as real as the others?”

“Of course they are,” I answered. “They are just as real, but, in fact, there are fewer of them than there used to be. The growth of small private savings has been very remarkable, and has gradually put very large numbers out of a condition of total financial helplessness. The economic trend has, on the whole, contracted the area of the proletariat, while the political trend has worked to expand it. The political trend is now becoming dominant, and people who are able to look after themselves are now being forcibly looked after.”

“Do you call a worker independent because he has a couple

of hundred in the bank ? ” asked Mr. Levi. “ Isn’t he a wage-slave still ? Isn’t he at the beck and call of the boss class ? Isn’t he at the mercy of the plunderers and exploiters ? Isn’t he as much a victim of the System as a beggar in the street ? Isn’t he one of the proletariat, and isn’t all the effort of the Capitalist State bent on keeping him there ? ”

“ If a worker has a couple of hundred pounds in the bank,” I answered firmly, “ he is a couple of hundred pounds away from being a slave. An economic slave is one who must work at what is ordered for him or starve immediately. A man with savings is a man with a bargaining position. The more savings the workers have under their own control and disposition, the stronger will their position be. But savings under State control and disposition add nothing to their liberty of choice.”

Mr. Levi went off on another tack. He said it was nonsense to expect the workers to save. Of course, it was very splendid if they did save ; it showed their sterling character and their noble desire to bring comfort and peace to their wives and children. But, also, it was right if they didn’t save. They knew that if they took a crust from the bread of each child, denied their wives the pretty fancies women so much loved, walked past the pub with a suffering step and averted their eyes from the bookie, they might scrape together a handful of wretched coppers, representing extortionate toil and extortionate penury of life, only to hand them over to the System, to be used as small shot in the economic slaughter in which they themselves were victims.

He could have gone on indefinitely in this strain, but Mr. Slattery interrupted in a decisive manner. He said that, if he understood me aright, I believed that a free economic system offered some opportunity to proletarians to escape from their state, however narrow the opportunity might sometimes be ; that some people had the qualities needed to take advantage of the opportunity, and that others had not—those others were the authentic proletarians. When I admitted that his summary was fairly accurate, he became severe.

“ I would like to make two points,” he said. “ First, I think that your mania for economic considerations leads you to exaggerate the worth of economic virtues. You talk about providence, abstinence and foresight in the manner of Gradgrind. Better and more generous virtues have no value in the economic struggle

and therefore you undervalue them. Your imaginary economic process would have as its perfect result a narrow, illiberal and stingy suburbanism universally extended."

"Hear, hear!" said Mr. Chatterjee, who is all for spiritual values.

"I won't pretend that suburban life is all that it should be," I admitted, "but I think it may still be the best nursery of character we have. A narrow, illiberal and stingy life is not a very charming life, but neither is a loose, licentious and luxurious life. The life of a suburbanite may lead to a self-destructive parsimony, just as the life of the peasant, so dear to the poets, may lead to the same thing, but it does not necessarily lead to these bad ends, and a high degree of personal pride, honest dealing, honest industry and responsibility are good things in themselves. The lower middle-class culture and the public school culture have been equally slanged and slandered by their own products. I don't want to see Britain all suburbs, but I would rather see it all suburbs than all slums."

"Let that go," said Mr. Slattery. "Though, it might be that there is more human richness and more intrinsic dignity of life and character in the slums than in the suburbs——"

"Yes," said Mr. Chatterjee, "what would you say to that?"

"The only pointed answer is one very rude word," I said, "so I won't answer at all."

"Let it go," repeated Mr. Slattery impatiently, "I want to ask my second question. I am assuming, of course, that you believe there are quite simple ways by which a prosperous community could look after its helpless and improvident members without imposing a pauper policy on the whole body of citizens. I daresay it would be possible to produce a scheme which really separated public relief from insurance. That would not be difficult if the resources were sufficient, as I daresay they will be. Levi may believe that you want the helpless poor to starve. I don't. But I do think you are supporting a system which will always leave us with a large number of helpless poor." He held up his hand. "Don't interrupt me to say that the opportunities are there, in the long run, for all. You yourself insist that many people haven't got the necessary qualities, though they have others, perhaps as fine. A system in which all the prizes go to successful runners is not a free system when you have large

numbers who will never be able to run. If industrial capitalism gives a rather thin opportunity to exceptional and not altogether admirable human qualities and nothing more, it is an incubus on mankind."

Mr. Slattery was very firm about this, and almost scornful. He had the full support of Mr. Chatterjee, who agreed with him, and of Mr. Levi, who disagreed with me.

"Can you deny," he went on, "that in our cities there is a much higher proportion of thriftless and irresponsible people than there is in country districts, which have a simpler and more human civilisation? If that is so, what can you say for a system which actually creates the weakness which disqualifies a man from profiting under the system?"

"I would like to know which system creates the weakness?" I asked him. "Is it industrialism or is it free enterprise? The effects of industrialism have been enormous and are not nearly worked out yet. But industrialism is here, and, barring a huge physical catastrophe, like a plague or a war of extermination, it will remain. You have asked me to be practical, and the only practical question is this: if you give industrialism the worst word in your mouth, still, is it more tolerable under a free economy than under an authoritarian economy? I say that, like any other system, it is more tolerable when it leaves scope for free action."

"But you don't deny that some element in industrialism has created irresponsibility," Mr. Slattery replied.

"Some element in our present state has done so," I corrected. "I deny that it is free enterprise, and I am not sure that it is industry. After all, the highest incidence of irresponsibility was found in the simple pastoralism of chattel slavery, and that is suggestive. I believe that irresponsibility is encouraged by lack of property, and I believe also that our chief problem to-day is to find some means by which the man who has saved money can translate it into some more personal and particular form of property, preferably into ownership of his own means of production."

"That's a tall order," said Mr. Baldero sceptically.

"It is a very tall order," I replied, "and it will be an impossible order so long as it is believed to be impossible—so long as employers like yourself are deeply hostile, and workers like Mr.

Levi's friends are as deeply indifferent. So long as the taxi driver working for a big company regards the man cruising on his own without envy and even looks on him as more or less of a class enemy, then so long will wage-slaves be dominant, for the victims are only concerned about their wages and not at all about their slavery."

"You sneered at me when I talked about wage-slavery," said Mr. Levi.

"Quite right, too," said Mr. Baldero. "It's all stuff and nonsense. Where's the slavery in a man doing a good day's work for a good day's wage? If he's working for a decent employer, he knows he won't be hardly treated or turned out into the street at a moment's notice. And, further, he knows it isn't the decent employer who objects to paying a bit towards his social security. That kind of talk comes from the highbrows with a lot of fine-spun social theories."

If his words had left any doubt as to where the fine-spinning came from, he removed it by staring at me with a stern and wrathful eye. A weariness of the soul fell on me, like a large, wet lump of snow from a roof. It will never be possible to convince Mr. Levi that a man cannot be free if he hands himself over, body and soul, to the State, in the belief that his one vote in thirty million, used to instruct a handful of men, not chosen by himself, will enable him to master the machine that masters them. It will be very difficult ever to convince Mr. Slattery that the right to pick and choose, to agree or refuse, in the primary matters of living is the basis of human liberty, because Mr. Slattery is in a position to enjoy these things unconsciously, and therefore under-rates them. It will be very difficult ever to convince Mr. Baldero that liberty is a common cause, and that he is weaving a net for himself when he helps in the binding of his workers. Still, disheartening as the prospect was, there was no harm in trying again.

"I think the term 'wage-slavery' has been much abused," I said. "None the less, it is not meaningless. The perfect example of the wage-slave is the man whose employer has him totally at his mercy, the man who is forced by a perpetual condition of destitution to accept whatever terms are offered to him. His condition is in some respects worse than the chattel slave's because his employer can discard him whenever he chooses. He is bound

to his work, but his work is not bound to him. But he is not worse in all respects, nor as bad in all respects, and it is merely cheap rhetoric to pretend that his condition is characteristic of a developed industrialism. Marxians would maintain that the condition of American negroes was fundamentally as bad after emancipation as it was before, and there may still be Southern reactionaries who would maintain that his enslaved condition was positively better. But that talk is humbug. Try to restore slavery, try to abolish the allegedly illusory benefits of civil freedom, and you will get your answer in blood.

"But, whatever the condition of the true wage-slave may be, it is absurd to pretend that the skilled wage-earner is a slave in any sense. A man whose skill is valued and not readily replacable is a worker by consent. Not only can he command a living wage and tolerable conditions, but he can also command some degree of respect for his idiosyncracies. There are many British manual workers of established worth who do things in their own way and at their own pace, are snappish with the management and jealous of any direction.

"In fact, there are many of these men, makers of precise tools and others, who might as well be working on their own, for all the management interferes with them. Why are they not working on their own? The management would at once say that buying the products of independent craftsmen would be a wasteful and unworkable system, but all they would really mean would be that they didn't want to work it. They give these excellent men a lot of rope, and even an amused and tolerant approval; but they like the air of concession about the whole thing; they like to be amused, they like to be tolerant, and they don't want the rope to be cut. I imagine Mr. Baldero may feel like that. He does not seem to realise that, while doing work at your own pace is good, doing work in your own time is something different and better; that, while having your right to free activity tacitly conceded is something, having that right openly admitted is more.

"Wage-earning is not wage-slavery, but every wage-earner submits his skill and effort to the direction of some other, and a submissive character will be developed in any community where the wage-earner is very nearly the universal man. What protects the status of the State or municipal doctor is the existence of a

larger number of independent doctors who give an air of independence to the whole profession. What, very largely, fixes the much lower status of the teaching profession is the fact that the independent men are so very few that they give no colour to the whole. Because independent manual workers are exceedingly few, Mr. Baldero doesn't think it is an indignity to a most valuable and responsible citizen that he should be penned to his job like a sheep and have his savings banked for him like a child."

Mr. Baldero looked uncomfortable.

"You exaggerate the effect of social insurance," he grumbled. "I mean all the effects, political, economic and all the rest. What's three or four bob a week to a man making eight or nine pounds?"

"Three or four bob is nine or twelve times the fourpence the thing started with," I replied. "It was started by the most alien mind that ever governed modern England, Mr. Lloyd George. In any event, it's not only the money and not only social insurance I am talking about. The whole scheme of paternalism is the threat, and I say that the thing is self-developing. It extends by its own necessities, till control is complete."

"Control will extend," said Mr. Gudgeon, puffing away at his pipe. "It is inevitable. Nothing can stop it."

"Nothing on earth," agreed Mr. Levi, with the rapt expression of a punter who sees his horse streaking down the straight, far ahead of the field.

"I keep thinking of spiritual values," said Mr. Chatterjee rather unhappily.

"Oh, we can put a stop to *that*," said Mr. Levi briskly, coming out of his happy dream.

"I'm thinking of what industrialism is doing to craftsmanship," Mr. Slattery said. "For all this talk about the skilled man and the high respect he is held in, he is being dropped on the scrap heap. You didn't have a free economy in the Middle Ages, but you had the craftsmen, and they built cathedrals. They didn't have economic independence in any degree that we would accept nowadays, but they made beautiful and queer, individual and majestic things, and they had richness and depth and colour in their lives that we haven't got. A good economic system multiplies craftsmen, a bad economic system multiplies mass-producers."



"There is much to be said for that," I answered, "but I will make bold to say that in no large community at any time within our knowledge were there so many skilled craftsmen as in mid-Victorian England, so many men apt and sound in the handling of stone and metal and wood. They produced the Albert Memorial and those numerous and happy fancies in cornices and caryatids and finials and floral wreaths and bunches of Portland grapes which adorn the public buildings of the period."

"But they weren't pleasing themselves," protested Mr. Slattery. "They were following the designs approved by some pursy alderman and some ass of an architect."

"Precisely," I said. "They were not their own masters."

"What about mass-production?" asked Mr. Slattery. "You can't deny that it's killing the craftsman and producing workers as lifeless and uniform as the material goods it turns out."

"Nothing can stop it," said Massa Gudgeon.

"Nothing on earth," said Massa Levi.

"Mass-production has very great evils," I admitted. "The root of the evils is not that mass production work is childishly easy, for easy work is sometimes interesting, but that it is irresponsible. The worker can hardly go wrong, except by deliberate intention, for the brain is in the machine, and not in the worker. But we must remember that there are many people who have no brains to put into their work, or, if they have, they prefer to put them elsewhere. We have the sad army of utter incompetents, the handless, dilatory, hazy-minded men who, in other days, were never taken on even for the most mindless job except in rush times, and then only with a sigh; the clumsy, depressed waitresses in shabby cafés who slopped about, spilling the tea for the wrong customer, getting the change wrong or forgetting the bill; the domestic servant who broke every dish she handled and couldn't wash a floor, or even tell whether it was dirty or clean. The robot factory gives these men and women, who have a right to live, some chance of living decently.

"Then, there is the great army of girls and young women who have no interest in the work they are doing, and no ambition to develop any interest. The duller, the easier, the more monotonous the job, the better they are pleased. It leaves them free to think of their home affairs, their boy friends, the next dance and their chances of getting married. They are atoms in the

job, they have no claim and no stake there ; but their interest is elsewhere."

"That's all very well," interrupted Mr. Slattery, "but you are talking about a minority of workers. Mass-production will reduce all workers to the status of atoms."

"Will it?" I asked him. "If Detroit has the lowest, it has also the highest-skilled workers in the world. When Ford stopped production on Model T., he still employed thousands of men inside his factory making the tools for his new car. In fact, there are great industries which mass-production has hardly touched, and even in those it has captured, the proportion of skilled to unskilled labour is by no means fixed. There are fewer craftsmen, proportionately, now than there were in mid-Victorian times, but there are more than there were in 1830. The tide of machine development has sometimes carried us to the shore we want to reach and sometimes carried us to the opposite shore ; so I don't feel inclined to be dogmatic about future developments. It is not even certain that machine development always works in the direction of massive plants and armies of workers. Not long ago, I noticed, in an American magazine, a photograph of a three horse-power electric motor. It was lying in the palm of a man's hand. That mass-production is a problem I can't deny, but I am not prepared to offer any solution, for the conditions of the problem are nothing like fully known. In this, as in the restoration of personal property we must feel our way, for industrialism is still in its dawn."

"In its twilight," said Mr. Slattery grimly.

"Perhaps so," I answered. "But this is certain. Whether we could stop the development of mass-production or not, the thing is not thinkable till we have a firm surety of peace. For mass-production is the potential of modern war, and to ask any nation to get rid of mass-production is to ask that nation to disarm."

"I trust we will ask all the nations to disarm," said Mr. Gudgeon, with much unction. "Social progress will be crippled so long as we have to bear this crushing burden of the weapons of destruction. I am sure Soviet Russia is only waiting to give us a lead."

Waiting to give us a lead. . . . What a happy expression ! What a neat summary of the whole problem ! "After you, Claude."

"I don't know what you're laughing at," said Mr. Gudgeon. "But I know that if the man who worked to put life into the League of Nations had been supported in the past——"

"After you, Cecil," I said.

## Chapter Six

### THE REIGN OF LAW

#### I

"YOU have nothing to say," Mr. Slattery announced with vigour and scorn. "Absolutely nothing. You claim that free enterprise will give the best results, on the whole. When free enterprise produces monopoly, you want to call in the police to redistribute the chips. But, when free enterprise produces mass-production, which reduces man's labour to the meaningless, ritual gestures of a children's game, you can only wait and see—technical development may take a turn for the better, and, anyway, we must have tanks."

"And so we must have tanks," I answered. "In this matter we are not free, no more than a man was free to take a walk across Hounslow Heath, carrying a bag of gold, in the days when highwaymen were about."

"But he *was* free," argued Mr. Slattery. "He could take the walk, if he wanted to."

"Yes," I agreed. "Once. You really mustn't ask me to provide a solution to a problem, when the first essential of the solution is the certainty of two generations of solid peace. I haven't the ear of the Kremlin, and I can't do much about feeling in Washington."

"All the same," persisted Mr. Slattery. "Your whole conception of law is negative. You think of Society as a kind of Stock Exchange with some kind of legal provision against cornering the market."

I took off my pince-nez, put them on the table and looked suitably severe.

"For the last time," I announced, "I must refute this allegation. I am not solely concerned with economic matters, I am not even principally concerned with them. But you asked me to be practical. If I had begun on any but the economic plane, Mr. Gudgeon and Mr. Levi would have laughed me to scorn, and Mr. Baldero would have gone to sleep. Therefore I began on the economic plane. But because my suggestions did not promise a rapid, painless and automatic diffusion of plenty, in these islands and all over the habitable globe, they were received with a very drooping eye. The best that I can offer is an economic policy that will be slow, laborious and not certain in its results; disappointing, at least, in contrast with our fond hopes and ambitions. But because it is modest in promise, I submit that it passes the first test in practicality. The unpractical scheme is the one which promises to solve in five years what has taxed the wit and energy of Man from the beginning of time."

"Your Brave New World," said Mr. Gudgeon, "is not very brave and not very new."

"Precisely," I said.

"Let's get away from economics," said Mr. Slattery, "and get back to this question of law. People of your kidney do regard Society as a sphere of competition and struggle, with a little co-operation practised by the successful out of their profits. You are the typical liberal anarchist. That is proved by the metaphors you use (if you don't, then your pals do). You talk of law as a series of regulations for 'keeping the ring,' 'seeing fair play,' 'directing the traffic,' and so on. You think of law as sustaining and regulating an activity, but having no concern with what ends of the activity, or what the results are likely to be—unless they threaten to put an end to the activity. Law, for you, is the protection of a kind of purposeless dynamism."

"Capitalist law," said Mr. Levi, "is the means by which property is guarded at the expense of life, and the privileges of the rich are protected from the poor."

"I wouldn't like to go with you all the way in that," Mr. Gudgeon amended cautiously. "But I must admit that there's a good deal of truth in what you say. Look at the Game Laws, and look at the way the police are always prowling round progressive movements, while they take care to leave the Fascist cliques alone."

"I understand it's very different in Russia," I said. "There the police take notes at every Fascist meeting, and anti-Communist processions are shepherded into side-streets, on the pretence that they interfere with the traffic."

"Oh, stop this chipping," cried Mr. Slattery irritably. "Do you admit that your conception of law is roughly what I said it was?"

"By no means," I answered, "though I do admit that there are some exponents of free enterprise who seem to deserve your censure. They carry on a bad habit of statement from earlier times when there was more excuse for it. When free enterprise was first argued, there was a whole body of moral principles and social doctrine so unquestioningly accepted that it occurred to nobody that these would ever be abandoned, or could be abandoned without the virtual dissolution of Society. This general framework, this notion of the end of human life and the common good of Society has cracked and split more than we are willing to admit, and it is necessary to remember that the fundamental Law is magisterial. It is 'written in the eternal constitution of things,' and we must not break it because we did not make it."

"Here!" cried Mr. Levi sharply. "What are you getting at?"

"There's a divinity which shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will," suggested Mr. Chatterjee brightly.

"So you won't accept the interpretation which says that the rule of law is secure when the discretionary power of the magistrate is reduced to a minimum, when the law is not directed *ad hoc* against individual acts, and is not retrospective, so that the citizen knows beforehand what he may and may not do, and what are the assigned penalties for infractions." Mr. Slattery seemed to be almost sorry that I didn't accept this interpretation.

"Much as I would like to please you," I said, "I must reject your definition violently. That was the view of Shylock, which he put with much cogency to the court of Venice. The conditions you have laid down are very important, but I doubt if anybody except Shylock ever maintained that they were the essence of the matter."

"But it has been maintained, very recently," Mr. Slattery objected, "and by one of your free enterprisers."

"His view may have been put too exclusively in those terms,"

I answered, "because he may have taken for granted the foundation of justice. Without that foundation, there is no law, but merely coercion, and coercion does not become justice or law merely because it is accepted and inspired by an overwhelming majority of the people."

"You mean," said Mr. Levi, "that, if an overwhelming majority of the people decide something must become law, and that something doesn't please you, then it isn't law."

"It isn't a question whether it pleases me or not——" I answered.

"Well, if it doesn't suit your notions," concluded Mr. Levi.

"They are not my notions," I corrected. "They are not anybody's notions. They are the truths. Imagine a savage island where it was a long-established rule that any sailors cast ashore should be divided in four parts and given for consumption to the four leading commissars. This law might be hoary with antiquity, unanimously approved by the islanders, and clearly understood by all the sailors who took the risk of trading in those parts, but we would put an end to it, if we could. We wouldn't say the law offended against our notions of justice or anybody else's notions of justice. We would simply say it offended against justice. That is how we behaved in India, where we respected many customs we did not like, but abolished suttee and the Thugs, because morality demanded it."

"Morality," said Mr. Levi, with an expression of strong nausea. "If we were so strong on morality, why didn't we abolish the Bengal famine?"

"Why, indeed?" I asked. "You make the proposal, I'll second it, we'll all vote for it, and the famine will be abolished."

"When you say that suttee was abolished on moral grounds," Mr. Chatterjee said, "do you mean that the invaders had a higher morality than the Indians?"

"Yes," I answered.

Mr. Chatterjee swallowed that.

"Well," he went on. "Do you not think it would have been better if these evil things had been abolished by the natives themselves, if they had reached the high European standard by their own efforts?"

"Undoubtedly," I agreed. "It is always better if the Law is fulfilled by voluntary effort. I think that, in Britain, it would

have been better if the worst evils of the Industrial Revolution had been corrected by the efforts and the initiative of the workers themselves, as a corporate body, rather than by the intervention of the State, urged on by philanthropists. But that process might well have been longer (and the State very stupidly killed the possibility), and I wouldn't have cared to argue the case with those who were suffering from the delay. Similarly, I would not have cared to explain to a young Indian widow that the moral improvement of her race would be better achieved if she were left to mount the funeral pyre and the abolition of suttee was postponed until it was generally agreed that it was not a good idea. In any event, the principle was absolute. We had to strike down the code of murder."

"How do you account for the moral inferiority of Indians?" asked Mr. Chatterjee. "Is the ordinary Indian so low that an invader can come in and 'strike down' his moral code?"

"The ordinary Indian is not so bad," I assured Mr. Chatterjee. "Indeed, it would be no great feat of moral athletics for the untrammelled Indian to reach the standards of the ordinary European, which are something less than imposing. But the Indian was not untrammelled. He was the prisoner of a Law, which was clear, predictable and not arbitrary, but was against justice."

"Against what *you* call justice," said Mr. Levi.

"What do you call it?" I asked him. "What does Mr. Chatterjee, a modern Indian, call it? Do you imagine that the morality of suttee is a matter of opinion?"

"I only imagine that we've no right to be superior," Mr. Levi retorted.

"It is not we who are superior," I said. "It is justice that is superior, and the real rule of law."

"What is this abstract justice?" asked Mr. Levi. Like Pilate, he stayed not for answer, but for a different reason. He was more than willing to provide his own. Justice was like religion—a cloak for fell practices and designs, a species of dope for the workers and a comforting illusion to disguise the nakedness of bourgeois selfishness. How could there be justice when judges fined street bookmakers and left telephone betting alone, when they put a man in jail for stealing an apple, and gave titles to the man who cornered the fruit market. "Justice!" he repeated. "Ha!"

"Justice," I said, "is what you are excited about. Accepting your instances, justice is what the judges sin against."

"You are talking now about ultimate truths," said Mr. Gudgeon in a booming voice, speaking with an access of happy authority, like a man called on to show some strangers round the town where he was born. "I believe, myself, that there are such truths which we must serve. But where do we find these truths? That is the question. Do we find them in the mythologies of religion? In the dark and blood-stained pages of the Old Testament? In the mental imprisonment of a dogmatic church, allied through the ages to wealth and pomp and power? I fancy not. Where, then, do we find it?"

"We find it in what the common people want and mean to have," Mr. Levi said.

But Mr. Gudgeon waved his arm in rejection.

"In a society which was based on production for the common good," he said, "and not for profit and the power of the few; in a society where every child was given the opportunity of mental and moral training designed to bring out the best in his spiritual capacities; in a society where life was gentle, orderly, and rich in promise and fulfilment; in a society where all toil was honourable and drones were not allowed; in a society where money was regarded as an instrument and not as a mark of merit and prestige; in a society where——"

Mr. Baldero released an explosive sigh. This kind of talk has a certain interest for me, but Mr. Baldero's blood pressure is too jumpy to stand it. What Mr. Gudgeon was trying to convey was that *his* notion of ultimate truth was much finer and deeper than Mr. Levi's, but it was taking him a long time. Mr. Levi was not deceived by the elaborations. He knew he was being put in his place, and, if there is one thing Mr. Levi doesn't like, it is *his* place.

"Get on with it," he said rudely, showing that his spiritual capacities had been much neglected by somebody.

Mr. Gudgeon is used to such interruptions, and clears them with the fluid ease of a well-trained hunter.

"I do not deny that what the common people want and mean to have is justice," he said. "But, just because they want it and do not yet have it, we must admit that they are not in a position to say precisely what it is." For a moment Mr. Gudgeon's brow



was clouded with a vague suspicion that what he had just said perhaps did not mean anything, but he quickly talked himself out of this intellectual weakness. "Abandoning the verdict of religion," he went on, "as something we have left behind, and postponing the verdict of the common people as something we must wait for—where do we find the solid basis, the authority, the sanction of ultimate belief without which we are—we are deprived of a sanction? I think analogy will assist us in our quest. Supposing a man finds himself at the edge of a dangerous and difficult piece of country which he must cross, but which he has not seen before, and about which he knows nothing; how will he try to find guidance and a sure passage? He will look for the tracks of those who have successfully crossed before him."

"How does he know they have successfully crossed?" asked Mr. Baldero.

"Because their records tell him so," answered Mr. Gudgeon testily.

"But they can't tell whether they have arrived or not until they have arrived," protested Mr. Baldero. "And they can't write records then. From whose bourne no traveller returns—you know what I mean."

"No analogy is complete," said Mr. Gudgeon, "but I imagine you all know what I mean. We know that certain of our fore-runners have arrived. We are convinced of that."

"How?" asked Mr. Baldero. He is quite unused to such speculations, but he was convinced that Mr. Gudgeon was begging questions up and down the philosophic street, and he wanted to stop him; but he didn't have command of the means.

"How do we know anything?" asked Mr. Gudgeon with rich scorn. "I will give up this analogy, as it seems to lead to misunderstanding. Rather, let me say quite simply, that the only moral basis for the modern man is the best that has been said and thought by the best, in all civilisations, past and present."

"I think that will give you a skimpy morality," I suggested. "I suppose you believe that free opinion is not merely part of the good life, but the necessary atmosphere of a good life. How many of the ancient team of higher thinkers really believed in free opinion?"

"Their social organisation was different," said Mr. Levi.

This explanation did not please Mr. Gudgeon, but he did not reject it, for he had no other.

"Then," I went on, "there are the small matters of slavery and infanticide, not to mention other practices approved by Eastern sages and holy men."

"The course of mankind is an upward course," announced Mr. Gudgeon.

"How can we know that," I asked him, "if we take for our authority men who confessedly did not know the course? There are certain great men of the past whom we admire and study. When our opinions coincide with theirs, we say that ours take their validity from this agreement. These men are our guiding stars and superiors; they are our human Absolute. But when our opinions do not coincide, we say that they are wrong."

"Because of their place in history," said Mr. Gudgeon.

"But you really must see that that doesn't matter," I persisted. "I can say that Socrates, for all his virtues and talents, had certain moral deficiencies owing to his place in historical development. That does not mean that I think I am superior to Socrates in native moral gifts, but it does mean that, by some standard which I can comprehend, Socrates is deficient—and it also follows that I did not learn that standard from Socrates. We cannot simultaneously judge a man, and take him as our judge."

"We can say he is right in one thing and wrong in others," objected Mr. Gudgeon.

"Yes," I agreed, "but that is not what you are claiming for these men. What you argue is that certain things are accepted as right because great men have said so, and that certain other things, which the great men have said, are wrong because *we* say so. It really won't do. We might say that we owe the discovery of moral truths to great moralists, but it's not because they discovered them that we know they are moral truths, but because they answer to something inside us. We don't accept the truths of geometry on the authority of Euclid. Euclid told us something which, on examination, we found to be true."

"You try telling a Nazi the truths of human brotherhood," said Mr. Levi.

"Moral truths are not like intellectual truths," I admitted. "If a man accepts the reasoning which tells him that the square on the side of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal

to the sum of the squares on the other two sides, he is not compelled to draw any awkward deductions from this intellectual agreement. He doesn't feel it necessary to stop his drinking, give up swindling and send away all his wives but one. He can continue with his cheerful indulgences, untroubled by the new light. But not if he admits a moral truth. Moral truths are radio-active."

"We're wandering from the point," said Mr. Gudgeon, who wanted to get back to his sermon. "It doesn't really matter whether we take our morality from the best men, or know they are the best men because they have preached our morality. It's the case of the hen coming before the egg or *vice versa*."

"But it does matter," I objected.

Mr. Gudgeon overruled that with a large wave of his hand.

"The fact is," he said, "that the Moral Plan of mankind is to be found in the thoughts of the best and wisest. Such men as Socrates, Aristotle—hum, Confucius, and eh, Hegel, and Bernard Shaw, Wells, of course, Julian Huxley, Marx, of course, and, I believe, a man like Keir Hardie. Then, surely, Man's moral stature has been raised by a Beethoven, his sense of pity by a Maxim Gorki, his understanding of the vast movements of life by a Tolstoy, his appreciation of spiritual depths by a Dostoevsky, his——"

"I wish you would keep to specific moral teachers," said Mr. Slattery. "You're getting pretty subjective when you come to Beethoven, aren't you? Take your philosophers and teachers, and tell me if you can extract from them a complete ethic which is all that you need to know, and which they all teach."

"Well, not exactly," Mr. Gudgeon admitted. "But we've discussed that already. Because of historic conditions, some of them had not reached the ultimate truth in certain directions. We select from them, discarding what is merely the inferior stuff which we can attribute to historic conditions, and extract the pure ore." He pondered uneasily for a second or two, and then brightened again. "We take the lowest common denominator of the highest common factor," he concluded triumphantly.

This was quite dazzling. We sat and admired it. But Mr. Levi felt that his colleague had gone very far from him, without coming perceptibly nearer to myself. He looked at me and suggested that Mr. Gudgeon's Golden Treasury of noble principles would not meet my requirements.

"No," I agreed: "It would not. I believe that there is a high standard of morality which men can reach by reason and conscience, painfully, haltingly and erratically. But I believe that the morality which we do accept is very much more extensive, and deeper. It is morality springing from religious doctrine; it is Christian morality. It was very notable that in Mr. Gudgeon's list, there was not one man who could be called a Christian, in the sense that Europe understood Christianity during all the centuries which are a blank to his mind. Yet, I fancy you will search the ancient sages long enough before you find more than scattered hints of that pity, that hope, that sense of the infinite value of the simplest and humblest man, which slowly permeated the human mind, and which is only now being quenched—I believe not for ever. Why was Karl Marx's rage impressive? Not by the force of any logic that his theory could supply, but because the dire, unnecessary want, the degradation and the slavery of his time were not merely hardships to the body, but insults to the soul. Why do we feel that pride is the one quite intolerable sin? Because it is a claim of lordship by a soul over souls; because it is the only sin that got into Heaven."

"I think you are now standing up for the common man," said Mr. Levi.

"Of course I am standing up for the common man," I replied. "But remember that all men are common men. They are of very different powers of mind and body and will. What is common to them all is their spiritual being, responsibility and destiny."

"Well," said Mr. Gudgeon handsomely, "I think you are going further than we are ready to follow. I am the last to deny that some of our most important moral truths have been expressed by, in, and perhaps popularised by, the Christian myth. But I'm afraid it's rather too late in the day to expect us to accept the myth as anything but a myth."

"It may be," I admitted, "that you are unwilling to believe or even to examine Christian doctrine, but the evidence is piling up that, if Christian doctrine goes to-day, the Christian virtues go to-morrow."

"Christians!" said Mr. Levi in derision. "They're a fine bunch, and I don't think. Not that they're all bad. The Dean

of Canterbury is all right. He can get a message across to the people. He gets them going."

"He lays them in the aisles," I suggested.

## II

"About this question of the rejection of Christian doctrine," I said the following night. "I think it's a very interesting topic."

Poor Mrs. Beveredge looked at me with a piteous eye. For a long time, now, she has spent as few minutes as she decently can with her guests. The discussions have worn her to a shadow of boredom, bewilderment, and apprehension. She doesn't know what it's all about, and she doesn't care; but she is morally certain that all this talk will end in a row. So she goes off to some private room, where she knits or casts her accounts while Willie does his homework beside her. Willie abandoned us long ago. The new theory that a schoolmaster and his pupil should form a happy comradeship of discovery, sharing each other's inmost minds and living in closest brotherhood has no supporter in Willie. When Mr. Gudgeon comes into the room, Willie goes out. He has voted with his feet.

The mention of religion made Mrs. Beveridge entirely sure that catastrophe was impending. She is, I understand, a Christian, but she puts religion, as a topic of conversation, in the same class as the more bitter forms of politics. No good comes of talking about it, she feels; the eternal purpose will best be served by everybody keeping a solid silence on the eternal purpose. I think otherwise.

"It would be interesting to know what are the grounds on which people refuse to examine Christian doctrine---I don't say reject the doctrine, because they do nothing so active as that. They merely turn their heads away. We turn our heads away from the flat-earth theory, we accept that the moon controls the tides, and we are, for the most part, unwilling to listen to the case against vivisection. But we don't, as a rule, remember why it is silly to say that the earth is flat, we have no clear notion of how the moon controls the tides, and we are opposed to anti-vivisection because anti-vivisectionists make us tired. But we do feel that there is a solid, logical case for the things which we believe, a case we can look up, if we feel inclined, just as we can consult an

encyclopædia. But where is the encyclopædia which puts the Christian faith among the myths ? ”

“ The mass of modern discovery,” said Mr. Gudgeon.

“ What has the mass of modern discovery discovered ? ” I asked. “ I fancy it is rather a large atmosphere of cloudy impressions which influences the modern mind, and a deep disinclination to distinguish between what is relevant and essential in religion, and what is the temporary and inessential interpretation of an age. No doubt there was much in the position of William Jennings Bryan which was open to the assault of fact and probability, but disposing of William Jennings Bryan is not quite the same thing as disposing of Augustine or Thomas Aquinas.”

“ But surely research in a dozen fields has exposed the myth for what it is,” said Mr. Gudgeon.

“ The key word in your claim is ‘ surely,’ ” I answered. “ In plain fact you don’t know. It is possible that a man might make a profound and exhaustive study of, say, anthropology, and convince himself that no interpretation of the Biblical story of creation will agree with his scientific conclusions. That is a possible result of study, and no more than that, but that is not the process followed by even point one per cent. of modern unbelievers.

“ What the characteristic unbeliever has gathered from anthropology is a vague memory that scientists dug up a bit of a skeleton in China or Java or Yucatan or somewhere, and that this skeleton, when completed and clothed in the appropriate flesh and blood must have looked for all the world like a member of the Comintern. He is the Missing Link, and he establishes Materialism, and all that it implies.

“ Similarly he recollects that Galileo was burned at the stake, or something, for saying that the earth is round, or, perhaps that it goes round the sun ; which proves that Christianity lives in deadly terror of the advancement of learning. History also tells him that the leaders of Christianity have always lived in enormous and shameful pomp, while they exhorted the humble faithful to starve in a holy and peaceable manner, which proves that the Christian doctrine is a myth—a rather strange conclusion, which we could apply with startling results elsewhere, such as that Stalin is a myth because of the scandalous but undeniable existence of Trotsky and his fellow wreckers.

"Field work in Palestine has shown that the walls of Jericho were destroyed by an earthquake and that the Temple in Jerusalem was nothing to make a song about. Therefore the Old Testament need no longer be considered. As for the New Testament, it is well known to be studded with inconsistencies, which somehow escaped the notice of purblind students for many centuries, until the full dawn of Reason, which was somewhere about the invention of the first steam engine.

"Then, there is Comparative Religion. Comparative Religion shows that in many extinct faiths and rites, men knelt and joined their hands in prayer, and did and thought many other things now done and thought by Christians, which shows they cannot possibly be true."

"This is a mere parody of the findings of modern scholarship," said Mr. Gudgeon impatiently.

"It may be a parody," I admitted. "But what the average unbeliever accepts is a parody. I am not challenging, for the moment, the serious work of modern scholars, but I *am* challenging the frivolous credulity of those who happily accept what the scholars say, or some of them say, without troubling to enquire what it is that they do say. I am not in a position to deny Mr. Bertrand Russell's eminence as a mathematical philosopher. I note that he denies conclusions concerning the existence of God which other men, no less eminent, accept as quite as potent as the sum of two and two. But I note two things more. One, that Mr. Russell preaches a moral code which his philosophy reduces to a sentimental mockery, so that Mr. Russell's morality will not survive the general acceptance of Mr. Russell's philosophy. Two, that those who do accept his philosophy are nearly all incapable of following his reasoning, and don't even know what his conclusions are, except that they are anti-Christian."

"That is an extreme statement," said Mr. Gudgeon.

"Extreme or not," I replied, "I believe it to be true."

"Whether it's true or not," said Mr. Levi, "you can take it that pie in the sky is off the menu. I don't want to hear your special pleading for outworn beliefs. I want to know what is the use of Christianity in the modern world, what can it do to make life better for the ordinary man."

"There is no theological finding on vitamin values," I reminded him. "The Early Fathers did not issue White Papers, and the

later fathers who do are striking an individual and solo note, though perhaps a very good one."

"All the same, Christianity has a view of life," said Mr. Slattery, "and that view must have some general relevance to political and social problems."

I agreed.

"Well, tell us what you see in the Christian view of life which will help us to make a richer and better community—not forgetting a richer and better mass production."

"I take that last as a jibe," I said meekly, "and I will also remind you that I have already said something on this point when I preached on the cardinal virtues."

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Levi, "but I didn't listen to that."

"Then prepare," I said, "not to listen again."

### III

"The essence of the Christian view of society," I began, "is that it is a community of persons, each having an immortal soul. That is to say, it is not a community of persons possessing common spiritual values, whatever that may mean, but a community of individual spirits. Therefore, any society which does not respect their individuality is an evil society, and any social philosophy which teaches that the most important and significant thing about any man in his membership of a class, a nation, a race or any other group is an evil philosophy. Therefore all social philosophies of the Mass Mind are un-Christian. Nazism, Fascism, Communism are all to be condemned; snobbery is not a philosophy, but it is also to be condemned.

"But it is the bad result of egalitarianism that it tries to secure equality by denying individuality; for individuality implies distinction and variety of attributes, which must be suppressed to ensure uniformity. The needs and wants and idiosyncrasies of men are extremely varied, but egalitarianism will give all the same satisfactions, so far as that humanly can be done. That leads directly to treating men as a Mass, and that is evil.

"This danger has become very real to us, partly because the simplest men living in the Christian tradition having a knowledge of their equality in the essential thing, their spiritual nature, try to express their sense of equality in social forms which prove unsatisfactory, or which will simply not bear the strain. Rejecting



or neglecting their spiritual claim, they turn their passions and energies to secure an equality of rank or wealth or public repute on earth, to such an extent that they move half-way or more towards materialism, and it is on the materialistic plane where equality is demanded that it is not to be achieved. For, on the religious view, differences of natural human endowment are inessential, but, on the materialistic plane they are the essence, because it is believed that there is no other plane—and the differences are still there. It is nonsense to pretend that all men are of equal value for purely human purposes, that the miner who can hew one ton of coal is, in some mystical interpretation of materialism, the equal of the miner who can hew five. To make the pretence is to poison the spirit with falsity and rancour. That falsity is shown by a fatuous attempt to secure egalitarianism in public honour, for example by the contention that an ordinary factory worker is the equal if not the superior of the manager in factory management.

"It is equally shown in the drive for equality of rewards. If the kindly State were able to give every man a grand piano, it would now be held undemocratic to say that the gift would be thrown away on many, including myself. It might be said that the unmusical should have the equivalent of a grand piano—but what is the equivalent of a grand piano? Material egalitarianism can only defeat human individuality by destroying it. Thus, in a totalitarian state, a musician will not be allowed to write music which does not have a totalitarian appeal, or an artist to paint pictures which do not immediately appeal to the man who knows nothing about pictures but knows what he doesn't like."

"That's nonsense," said Mr. Levi. "In Soviet Russia, the highest honour is paid to great scientists and writers."

"So long," I answered, "as they are subservient to the Mass, but no longer. It was in your Communist daily that I saw the headline, 'Eleven Thousand Scientists' vote for something or other. The 'scientists' were members of an association of scientific workers. You could as easily collect eleven thousand historians or mathematicians from the ranks of the N.U.T. It was the same paper which explained how knowledge of science was being very widely spread among the simplest in Russia, and gave an account of a popular tuition that was much below the level of instruction provided by our cigarette cards, but was no

doubt as much as many of the pupils could grasp. Up to a point, it is true to say that the work of a craftsman in an aircraft factory is as 'valuable' as the work of the designer, because the designer could not build the aeroplane himself. But, the death of a hundred designers would make a bigger difference to the industry than the death of a hundred workers. It goes further than that. There are men, to-day, working lathes which they cannot possibly work wrongly, because the lathes are literally fool-proof; they are proofed against fools. He may make the wrong movements, but there is a guard to prevent them taking effect. He cannot even practice sabotage. Soon, it may be, the designer will produce a still-further improved lathe which does not need a worker at all.

"If the plain man bases his claim to regard on his material contribution to society, he will have given away his case. Ordinary people like ourselves will be put in our place, and it will not be a high one. I think, myself, that the only solution to the dilemma of materialistic equality is in the mob. The Mass is the mob scientifically directed. When all social activity is a communal surge, however cynically controlled, and when women march with banners to a spelling bee and men with trumpets to clean the streets, to kick the Jews, to shout for the blood of Trotskyites or a Second Front, they feel power, but it is not individual power, they feel a release, but not an individual release. They find a Soul—at the price of their souls. Therefore, the Christian fears and dislikes all mob activity.

"But there is more. The strongest political tendency of the day is to order the most intimate, personal and individual concerns of the private men by the authority of generalised decisions and a majority consent. We send up our votes like vapour, and decisions come down like rain which soaks us through to the marrow of the bone. I admit that there is a sharp difference among Christians as to the propriety of this method. But I believe there is only this difference because the Christian mind is, for the moment, weak and sometimes intimidated. The collective will is not an individual will; it has a quite artificial uniformity. It seems to me very wrong that a method which is proper for large, general and public decisions should govern small, particular and private affairs. Regulation of traffic in streets is an impersonal and public matter, to be decided by

popular vote. Regulation of life in private houses is a personal and private matter, to be decided by those who live in the houses.

"I have perhaps given too much time to the accidental inequalities of human endowment, and too little to the essential equality of men. No State is a worthy state which despises any man for the limitations of his material contribution, or which fails to respect in all men the dignity which comes from their inheritance and their destiny. We must respect human nature and its functioning. We must allow men to grow and develop in the modes and the forms which are natural to man. But with the knowledge of that destiny goes the knowledge of individual responsibility. If Man is a responsible being, then the State should not only refrain from snatching that responsibility away from him, but should discourage him from abandoning it, as we discourage women from abandoning their children.

"This question of responsibility has a bearing on the structure and purpose of the family, and on the more general problem of good citizenship. The man who thinks in class-terms cannot think in terms of individual responsibility."

"What about the man who is a traitor to his class?" growled Mr. Levi.

"I had forgotten him," I admitted. "But when you say a man is a traitor to his class, you surely mean a worker who is a traitor to the proletariat, not a bourgeois who is a traitor to the bourgeoisie. A man who regards morality as a bye-product of class conditions should not blame any man for anything he does, if his conduct is an answer to his economic environment. But most thinkers are unable to preserve this austere attitude, so they compromise by blaming the members of the other class for everything they do, and blaming the members of their own class for nothing. If a Fascist assaults a policeman, he is making an attack of incredible insolence and wanton brutality on a guardian of the peace; but, if a Communist assaults a policeman, the poor fellow is merely striking out in blind and gallant hopelessness against the System. It runs through the economic scale. The amours of the rich are crapulous, but the amours of the People are a hearty expression of vitality and a mockery of sterile bourgeois morality.

"A group acquittal of this kind is insulting to the poor. The true democrat was the medieval priest who once denounced a poor congregation for their bad lives. He counted the number

of grievous sins they were in a position to commit. It came to a fair total, but it was nothing to the darkly splendid catalogue of crime that lay within the power of the great ones, notably the clerics. But, he declared, in spite of their happy position, the poor were as bad as the rich, and they ought to be ashamed of themselves for this low and disgusting condition.

"Human destiny is a responsible destiny. On that lies our claim to respect from each other. A young girl, living in dire poverty and an evil environment, may very likely go on the streets, and a young man, bred in wanton luxury may very well buy her in insolent contempt. But we cannot say that the two sinners are not in some degree responsible, unless we are prepared to admit that they ought to be in an asylum or a slave compound. Although men who have been sorely tried may expect compassion, understanding and mercy, they are yet immortal beings, and, with that dignity, they cannot entirely disclaim the consequences of what they do. There is no freedom and no dignity without responsibility.

"Another consideration. Because a man is what he is, material comfort will not satisfy him. Vitamins are not the food of the spirit and a bungalow is not its dwelling place. Therefore, a society which concentrates on material gains will be at once immensely productive and immensely sterile, satiated and hungry, busy and enormously bored. The clamour of discontent does not arise chiefly from the deepest poverty, because it does not come chiefly from the very poorest. Long and helpless unemployment is enormously worse than deep poverty, because poverty is a denial of comfort and material well-being, but neglected idleness is a denial of responsibility and freedom. But, is not long and hopeless employment, enforced under an Essential Work Order also a denial of freedom and responsibility?

"Lastly, I would suggest proportion as a contribution of the Christian mind, and also modesty of expectation. If we don't believe this world to be the only world, we will not expect it to be perfect, and shall be right. The vanity of human wishes, the uncertainty and insufficiency of achievement, the unceasing danger of collapse and internal betrayal have been well understood, 'from the first corse till he that died to-day'; but not by many of those who are still living. The advantage of not over-budgeting on expectations is undeniable.

"No less is the advantage of keeping things in due proportion and order. A particular proposal may have much to recommend it in its short range effects, and yet, when examined from the point of view of larger interests, it may prove to be a step in the wrong direction. For example, there is semi-official approval for a suggestion that schoolchildren should be taught the facts of sex, without the authority of their parents being asked or given. In support of this proposal, it is argued that many parents who would baulk at giving authority for the instruction are secretly or even openly relieved when it is given without their permission. That is no doubt true, but, apart altogether from the merits of class instruction in sex, nobody who believes that parents are responsible beings, can approve of their being treated in exactly the spirit which is tolerable in the treatment of children.

"There are countless examples of the same kind, some of them carrying the mark of their self-defeating tendencies on their faces, like the suggestion of the Conservative Women's Committee who say that mothers should be freed from the drudgery of preparing home meals for their children—and should be conscripted to cook meals in schools.

"The tendency to pursue immediate and concrete ends at the expense of larger interests, which are none the less real because they may be more vague should be more easily avoided by those who are convinced of the need to subordinate all particular human ends to one overriding purpose. I do not say that it is always so, for the capacity of the human mind to resist the most obvious inference from its own principles is nothing short of heroic. But the whole social effect of Christianity will be misjudged if it is considered over the space of a mere moment, like one generation. The social influence of Christianity has been a slow and partial infiltration, of better modes of thinking and doing, with many and severe local and temporal setbacks and disappointments. The lives of Christian men have been stained by many and appalling sins of pride and cruelty, injustice and dishonour, but there has always been the hope, and often the reality of better things, so long as Christian teaching has not been stamped out; for the conscience may waken after the longest sleep, and there is always the chance of reform so long as men know sins for what they are."

## Chapter Seven

### PUBLIC APPEAL

“**T**RIPLE,” said Mr. Levi. “Unadulterated, blinking tripe. I daresay you mean well, and you would like to run society like a church bazaar. You tell an unemployed hunger marcher that you respect his fundamental equality but he mustn’t spoil it all by trying to get a materialistic thing like a job, and see what he says. You try it on a man marching from Glasgow to London in search of a job.”

“I wouldn’t,” I answered, “but I would try it on the man who was being hunger-marched by Social Security from Glasgow to London for a job he much disliked. I believe that enormously more could have been done in times of distress to provide work for the unemployed, and I think also that a number of the unemployed showed an extreme unwillingness to change either their occupation or their place of residence. They may have made a mistake, but the Government will make a much greater and more dangerous mistake, if it tries to force them.”

“But you can’t allow a man to pick and choose his job if he’s living on public money,” grumbled Mr. Baldero.

Mr. Levi didn’t like the way this was put, but he was not inclined to disagree with the principle.

“Perhaps public money cannot be indefinitely expended on people who refuse to work except at one job in one town,” I answered. “But what about private money? What about the worker’s own money, which has been taken from him, week by week? I know the problem is enormously difficult, but it is not to be solved by treating men as if they were in debt to the State, whereas the State is in debt to them. It is right that the State should assist social groups to organise their insurance, should undertake whatever insurance cannot be so organised, and should lend all proper aid to those who are outside the schemes. The aid to those who have chosen not to insure must obviously be on different conditions from proper insurance payments, but it must not be given according to the rigid and automatic formulas which are such a solace and protection to the Civil Service. If possible, it should not be administered solely by State officials. Trade

unions and similar bodies could do much useful work here, if they were ready to be more than sectional bodies, and to accept responsibility to the public at large."

"No fear," said Mr. Levi. "They won't do your dirty work for you."

"You seem to fear that the work must be dirty," I answered. "You want it done, but done by other people, whom you can blame. In other words, you intend to be quite irresponsible until you get a Communist State."

"In a Communist State," said Mr. Levi, "there will be no unemployment."

"There will be forced labour," I answered. "There is no other way of insuring permanent and full employment."

"What you want is freedom and unemployment," said Mr. Levi. "Freedom to beg. Freedom to starve. Freedom to be batoned and shot and jailed if you raise your voice for your rights. Freedom to live in a filthy den. Freedom to see your daughter on the streets. Freedom to——"

"In India," said Mr. Chatterjee, "we know all about freedom to starve."

"You sure do," said Mr. Levi. "When I think of Bengal my blood boils."

"I was thinking of Mr. Gandhi," I said mildly. "The wretched people of Bengal were not free to starve; they had to starve. The Indian who was free to starve was Mr. Gandhi. He chose to starve. Would you have prevented him?" There was no answer. "You want a society where nobody is compelled to starve. So do I. But you admire the society where a man is paid 'according to his work,' which means that the man who can't work enough can't eat enough, and means also that the work he does is the work chosen by the State."

"Nobody ever starved in Communist Russia," Mr. Levi declared hotly, "except, maybe, wreckers and reactionary peasants who tried to hide their grain, and people like that."

"In other words, the people the State wished to starve," I said. "Perhaps your list is not complete. Russia is a State run for the workers, but it seems to me that the Russian Government has a different definition of a worker from the one popular here. A worker, here, is a member of the proletariat. In Russia, a worker is a man who works. Just how much of the national

income is spent on those who are of no economic value to the State? I don't mean children, who are potential workers, but the aged, the infirm and the incurably incompetent? I want a society where a man is free to order his own life and judge his own risks and responsibilities, so far as this is compatible with having an organised society at all. That means that a man is free to take risks and may suffer sharp setbacks and disappointments, but a good society will not permit the unfortunate to starve, or come near it."

"But suppose the unfortunate man says, 'To hell with your dole,' I'm going to tramp the roads and cut myself loose?" It was Mr. Slattery who asked the question. He would.

"The State will say, 'To hell with you. Tramp away.'" It was Mr. Baldero who answered.

"I always offer a tramp food," said Mrs. Beveridge. "I daresay they mostly throw it away. But, if they really need it, they'll eat it."

"I'm afraid we can't base a social system on what people like you will do, Mrs. Beveridge," Mr. Levi said condescendingly.

"And why not?" I asked him. "The State is a social form for implementing the public and general intentions of people like Mrs. Beveridge. Taking a general view of tramps and tramping, Mrs. Beveridge would no doubt vote with Mr. Baldero. Taking a private view of a single tramp, she acts in a different, but supplementary way. It seems to me ideal."

"Private charity," said Mr. Levi, "is putting a plaster on a festering wound."

"That is the most up-to-date medical treatment," I reminded him. "It gives a chance for the spontaneous, organic forces of the body to work their own cure. That is what we ought to do with all social evils, when possible. The surgeon's knife and the antiseptic are emergency treatments."

"You still haven't given me your answer about the tramp," said Mr. Slattery. "Would you put him in plaster, too?"

"For God's sake," shouted Mr. Baldero. "Is this a country of tramps? Say something about positive ordinary people. Say something that would win an election."

"That's an idea," I answered. "I think 'positive' is the important word. So long as I deal with negatives, Mr. Gudgeon and Mr. Levi will win all along the line. If Mr. Gudgeon says, 'No child should have a better opportunity than any other boy,'



and I say that some children should have better opportunities than other children, I won't have much bother in counting my votes. I am accepting the terms of Mr. Levi's negative, and giving him the very answer he wants."

"What other can you give me?" asked Mr. Levi.

"A People's Charter," I said.

Mrs. Beveridge sighed.

"Is it long?" she asked.

"I'm afraid it isn't short," I said. "But I certainly won't be allowed to finish it, so you needn't be unduly distressed. Here goes for Clause One:

"Clause One. Because a man is an individual creation of God, he has certain private rights which no other man can deny him. But because he is a social being, he cannot be considered as one identical atom out of millions. He is one of a group. The primitive social group is the family. No later development has done anything like so much to encourage human virtues and enrich human life. Therefore, it is socially evil to weaken the bond of the family.

"But the bond of the family is very largely an economic bond. To put it in a less chilly way, the bond of the family is responsibility. If the family loses that mixture of authority, comradeship and sacrifice which responsibility evokes the family has lost its life. The State which removes nine-tenths of family responsibility and more than half of family authority is reducing society from the organic to the inorganic."

"Ha! Ha!" cried Mr. Levi merrily. "Try that on a crowd in Trafalgar Square. 'Rally round the Organic Family! The Good Old Carbon Compound, the Mixture as Before!' That *will* rake in the votes, won't it?"

"I had no such thoughts," I answered coldly. "But I would ask a crowd in Trafalgar Square if a man had a right and duty to do the best he can for his children, and if any Government could justly deny him that right. That would be my positive approach, and I believe it would appeal to almost every man, once he learned to neglect clap-trap about egalitarianism, and began to consult his own instincts."

"That means that the family is responsible for bringing up and educating the children," Mr. Levi said, in a tone which indicated that the thing had only to be stated to be disposed of.

"Certainly," I answered. "That position is occupied by all the Socialists who spend all they can afford on their own children, and refuse to send them to a school which they think unsatisfactory, if they can afford to send them elsewhere. I admit that some would vote for all children to be sent to the school chosen for them by the State, but those who would do so are usually those whose families have grown up ; and, anyway, so long as there is an advantage going, they are determined that their children shall have it. They will talk about perishing in the vanguard of a new political movement, leaving nothing more tangible than an inspiration and example behind them ; but they don't even talk of sacrificing their children in the new educational movement."

"That's fine and dandy," said Mr. Levi. "But you mean that the children of the wealthy will have a better education than the children of the poor. The poor won't stand for that."

"A more expensive education," I amended. "But, if I put it to the public that a child has a right to benefit from the efforts of his father, and a father the right to make the efforts, everybody will agree with me, except those who don't mean to make any effort. You are legislating for the irresponsible. The responsible don't like it ; whether the responsible are rich or poor makes no difference ; they don't like it."

"You favour inheritance ?" asked Mr. Levi.

"Yes," I answered. "Undoubtedly, huge and dominating fortunes may have to be broken up, but I strongly favour inheritance as a principle. In spite of my belief in free action, I am opposed to social chaos, whereas you like it. I don't believe that each generation is like a sheet of paper laid on a huge pile of sheets, called the past, neither joining with the pile or drawing anything from it. I don't like a society where the heads of men are continually bobbing up and down, like drowning men in a rough sea. I believe that modest and even considerable inheritance adds something of extreme value to a State, like long fibres in a plant or tree."

"But the poor man's son can stay down in the roots, where God was pleased to put him," said Mr. Levi bitterly. Mr. Gudgeon frowned his stern agreement.

"I mean nothing of the kind," I answered. "I don't imagine the family as a closed ring. There are wider, though less close

and valuable communities. I believe that we ought to supplement, not to abolish, the family contribution to education. I believe that all children of talent should be offered the opportunity of higher education, because we need all the talent we have, and because I think it must be galling and most embittering to a clever and ambitious child to be shut off from his chance by neglect, either by the State, or, as more often happens, by his parents. But I would also tell the Trafalgar Square audience that the new Education Act will infallibly make the position of the poor and clever lad much worse than it is now, because the Act proceeds to reform by adding another storey to a building which is patently rotten at the foundations."

"You can't just say the Bill is bad," said Mr. Slattery. I had a shocked suspicion that he thought it was good. "You can't beat something with nothing. What are you going to do?"

"Precisely," said Mr. Gudgeon.

"Make the simple reform that is obvious to everybody except educationists and politicians," I said. "At present we have a huge mass of pupils who don't go on for higher education, or take proper advantage, if they do. We don't know, at present, to what extent we are losing the right material for higher education."

"We know perfectly well," answered Mr. Levi. "The children of the workers are every bit as——"

"Precisely," interrupted Mr. Gudgeon. "Intelligence tests show——"

"Precisely nothing," I interrupted in turn. "You know as a teacher that pure intelligence is only one element in the compound. An oral intelligence test may show that a boy of twelve is by no means defective, and yet that boy may be unable to do a written test at all, because he has been too sluggish in his mind to learn to read and write as competently as a bright infant of six."

"Why has he not learned?" retorted Mr. Gudgeon. "May it not be that he has suffered from the overcrowded and insanitary classes of his elementary school?"

"It may very well be," I answered, with modest triumph. "You are leading me by the hand to my practical proposal. We can't tell how many children are fit for a good higher education till we have given them a good lower education. Therefore, scrap your absurd Act, which can only be implemented by the most wretched patchwork methods for many years to come. The

Act will increase the overcrowding, the insanitary conditions and the number of inefficient and badly-trained teachers. These evils which you denounce in the present range of teaching, you bless with a merry smile and call 'extemporising' when they appear to be essential to your lofty schemes. Drop your schemes. Let the Act fade into a noble cloud like the Kellogg Pact, and concentrate your energies, gather the properly trained teachers, and put up the proper buildings for reducing the numbers in infant classes by at least half. Then, when you have a firm foundation, you will be able to look to your roof. I rather fancy that would go down like beer in Trafalgar Square. People don't want their children of fifteen held in their school desks by policemen, but they do want to see their babies having a healthy and happy life in the infant room, under teachers who are able to give them individual care and affection."

"Quite right," said Mr. Baldero. "And, if they learned something in the early stages, they might be able to read and write when they're fourteen."

"Of course, if you want schools to turn-out docile and conditioned clerks and message boys, you'll approve of these suggestions, but if you happen to want Education For Democracy, you'll not be prepared to scrap the Act." He paused and added, like a ritual prayer, "Imperfect as it is."

"The course I have suggested," I answered, "would have the approval of the children. It would have the approval of all the parents who are vitally affected by the Act—the parents who take their children from school at fourteen. It would have the approval of every teacher who is not on a committee. It would have the approval of employers, whether capitalist or socialist, because employers want their novices to be employable. Against it would be the great surging multitudes of the progressive societies, and the keen, advanced thinkers who know a good racket when they smell it, and think they can land a good job. I fancy the Ayes have it."

Mr. Levi looked at Mr. Gudgeon. It was plainly up to the professional to step into this dangerous breach.

"The great mistake of debaters," said Mr. Gudgeon, in the tone of a man opening a W.E.A. lecture, "is to take their premises for granted and then expect their opponents to accept their conclusions, by the force of what they are pleased to call logic."

But I am afraid I am rather too old a hand to fall into that particular trap. If we really had to choose between improved infant education and the Great Act, we might indeed have a problem to solve. But it happens, strangely enough, that I am in favour of both. By all means, have your improvements, which are also my improvements. But, let us also have the Act." He smiled like a man who has completed a hundred break at billiards, and rested on his dialectical cue. Mr. Levi smiled also, with warm approval. Mr. Chatterjee looked at me anxiously, for he thought I was going to lose my temper. He was right ; I was.

I closed my eyes and prayed for patience, but I was much disturbed by balls of red fire which expanded and contracted before my inner sight. I spoke slowly and low, partly because I was struggling for patience, and partly because I was incommoded by a lump of hot iron which was blocking my throat and threatening to choke me.

"You will admit," I said, "that your resources in teachers, buildings, equipment and teaching matter and methods are quite inadequate to implement the provisions of the Great Act. You will admit that it will take the most ingenious use of substitute resources, both material and human, to work the Act at all, and that the raising of the school age for the second extra year, and the creation of Young Peoples' Colleges will add enormously to the burden laid on the system by the first extra year. Will you not admit, then, that the improvement of infant teaching simply must be retarded by these wide, experimental expansions, which will absorb all the resources which might be devoted to that improvement?"

"There's no such word as 'must,'" said Mr. Gudgeon. "Where there's a will there's a way."

"My God!" I cried. "My God! There *is* such a word as 'must,' Mr. Gudgeon. Where there's a will, there is *not* always, or even usually a way. When a man hears such a declaration of faith as that, there is nothing he can do but groan and cry."

"Now, now," said Mrs. Beveridge, with much vigour. "There is no need to be personally offensive or to lose your temper." As has been noted, she has recently resumed her place at our little conversations ; not because she likes them, but because she has had a presentiment that a row was bound to break out, and it would be her duty to quell it. Here it was, her *dies iræ*.

"I am sorry, Mrs. Beveridge," I said, after a hard swallow. "But I think there is a need to lose my temper, because it is beyond my powers to keep it. I have no wish to be personally offensive to Mr. Gudgeon. Indeed, if it was a personal matter, I would imitate Mr. Baldero's technique and retire behind a newspaper. But it happens that public opinion is being moulded, and legislation is being dictated by people who talk that way, by people who have no more sense of reality than the philosophers on the island of Laputa. Huge and perhaps irretrievable damage is being done by this fatuity. In every branch of public life and action, the boys with the wills are going about, getting in each others' way. If you want to explain the mysterious decay that seizes on all great empires and finishes them, I think a rapid but unnoticed spread of silliness is the answer spreading like a rumour or a share-buying fever, till the whole nation is unbalanced and then the crash comes.

"Well," said Mr. Gudgeon, whose face had flushed. "If that's you not being offensive, I wouldn't like to hear you try."

"You wouldn't," I said.

"I think it would be better to go to the second article in your Peoples' Charter," said Mr. Slattery.

"Perhaps it would," agreed Mrs. Beveridge. "But not to-night." She turned to me, with an appealing look. "Wouldn't you like to go for a nice walk?"

## II

There was an air of constraint on the party when we gathered for supper the following night. Mrs. Beveridge talked in a bright, dazed manner about the weather, the difficulties of shopping and the prospects of the British film industry, appealing for corroboration and comment to all the guests in turn, except myself. Mr. Gudgeon was her most helpful supporter. He talked about the rainfall, dehydrated herring and British travelogues, with many side-glances at myself to show that he was toying with these trivialities because it was not possible to discuss any serious topic without running a risk of another indisciplined outburst.

The meal passed in strenuous peace, and then Mrs. Beveridge went out to superintend the clearing away, casting more than one longing, lingering glance behind. We drew up our chairs to the fire.

"The Second Article of the Peoples' Charter," I said briskly, "is, in essence, a development of the first. The family is the most valuable, the most vital and most fruitful social group ; but a man cannot live in free comfort with the family as his only social form. There must be many other groups between the individual man and the State, and these other groups, like the family will grow weak and meaningless unless they are endowed with power, property or its equivalent, and social responsibility. They are, of course, subordinate to the final authority of the State, but the State's authority should be used, not to usurp the powers and rights of these groups, but to keep the powers and rights of one group from usurping the powers and rights of another."

"Why shouldn't all power lie in the hands of the State, which expressed the will of all the people?" Mr. Levi demanded, his unwillingness to encourage me overwhelmed by his inability to keep quiet.

"Because it is a political delusion that the State represents the will of the people in any direct, immediate and sensitive way," I answered. "Also, because 'the will of the people' is a very dangerous abstraction. It means, in theory, the will of the majority, and, in fact, the will of the organised few. Even if it does represent the will of the majority, there are many things in which the will of the majority is an insolence and an irrelevance because it invades the private rights of man."

"Such as?" asked Mr. Gudgeon. He hadn't meant to say anything, but he had been trapped by his own teaching technique. He was taking a hardly conscious pot shot at a rash statement.

"The will of a lynching party," I answered. "The Bible tells us that it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of Man. But, to continue. Even when the will of the people is not a tyrannical invasion of some private person's rights, it is never a sufficient expression of the individuality and complexity of the human mood and mind. It is a generalised and averaged will, and men cannot be completely governed by such a will, for that which represents the common factor does not, for that very reason, represent the full, real and valid will of one single person."

"Gosh!" cried Mr. Levi. "This is what you call being practical!"

"That is what I call being practical," I agreed equably.

"But, to follow the historical precept of *aucune idée sans fait*, I will particularise. A man who has no children may give a passive and uncritical assent to the new Education Act, by the simple process of voting for the party which supports the Act because it also supports something else he happens to want seriously. He may even be an enthusiast for education without having any competence in the mystery. For example, Mr. Tony Galento, the pugilist, has an honourable and creditable ambition to see American youth suck the last drop of the deepest learning. He said, 'Any boy is a fool who leaves school without going through Yale and Harvard.' I suggest that the pronouncement showed no thorough grasp of the technical limitations of the means to his ideal end; it showed none of the profound understanding, not to mention the intuition, which are demanded of any policy affecting human personality. Mr. Galento was speaking in a generalised way."

"His heart was in the right place, anyway," said Mr. Levi.

"It was," I admitted, "but his head was in two places at once. The encouragement of useful social groups having real responsibility and power will do more than promote efficiency. It will naturalise the members of these groups as members of the whole community. Those of our citizens who present a grave problem because they are 'out of it,' or feel they are, are those on whom the State makes no special demands, who are asked for no special and constructive contribution and are bound to each other by nothing but sentiment. The groups to which they do belong are so weak and narrow in purpose that they give none of the intimacy and confidence of family association. Therefore we should strengthen all possibly useful groups by endowing them with responsibility towards the general public, and encouraging them to accept that responsibility. The contented citizen is the man who feels he has something to give to the community."

"The contented citizen is the man who believes that the community is doing its best for him," said Mr. Gudgeon.

"If that is your belief," I answered, "I am afraid that your lessons in citizenship will be worse than useless. In fact, what makes you and your kind more or less contented is that you think you have something very valuable to give which people must be made to want. When you ask the State to do its best for you, you don't merely mean that the State should increase your



salary. You also want the State to give you wider opportunities to exercise your skill and so benefit the nation. It happens that I don't agree with your programme, but I don't deny that your aims are very largely altruistic. But the teachers' social group is, I think, much too divided and much too shallow in purpose, much too thinly endowed with responsibility and too richly endowed with generalised ambitions to be nearly as useful to the public as it might be. The doctors are in a much happier state. Doctors are a contented lot, and they enjoy a rather high social prestige because——"

"Because they don't work for profit," said Mr. Levi.

"The highest prestige is enjoyed by the doctors who make the most money," I answered. "By the eminent surgeons. No, they enjoy prestige because it is known that they administer a very important social interest for the general benefit. The disciplinary decisions of the General Medical Council are often criticised. They are accused of showing professional jealousy against brilliant outsiders, but most of us are happy that the Council should err on the side of conservatism, and, anyway, in their strict handling of certain professional delinquencies, they are showing severity for the protection of the patient."

"All the same, they're a bit of a vested interest," said Mr. Levi.

"I quite approve of that," I answered. "I want to vest all interests. That is what the Fascist states pretended to do. It was only a pretence, but it may have been a psychological success. Supposing the Government created a teaching body, like the General Medical Council, and gave them the right to decide what irregular qualifications would be accepted for the new drafts of teachers, and what the kind and duration of the training should be, I rather fancy that the average man who is distinctly cold to teachers' flamboyant claims for an educational New Jerusalem would respect their decision on a technical matter which they really understood, and would trust the integrity of their professional conscience."

"What about business men and employers?" asked Mr. Baldero.

"They don't need any such specific grouping," I replied. "They feel that they are contributors in many ways to the social good, and are quite contented on that score. Also, they do have economic responsibilities, sometimes very much too great."

"What about the workers?" asked Mr. Levi.

"For many years past," I said, "the unions have been merrily engaged in demolishing every claim they have on the interest of their members. The social work of amelioration and security which they used to do, or attempt to do, is now done, at their behest, by the State, and more and more the fixing of wage rates and industrial conditions is done by political, not union activity. The unions ought to look round for some work to do. In social insurance, in the promised technical schools and in the care of apprentices, there is much responsibility they could properly take on and effectively discharge. An ordinary A.E.U. member would be a more interested member if he felt that his son could go to Cambridge, take a mathematics degree, and end as principal of an A.E.U. technical school, and all without leaving the ranks of the union."

"Who would pay for these technical schools?" asked Mr. Levi cautiously.

"No doubt the community would pay the basic costs," I said, "but I would like to see the union spending some of its own money in making its own school the best school of its kind. I would also like the miners' union to buy a handful of pits and show what it can do with them."

"Are you going to give these associations absolute power inside their own industry or occupation?" asked Mr. Slattery.

"By no means," I answered. "For example, I would allow no association to make an arbitrary limitation of entrants, for the benefit of the members in possession. That, I think, is cardinal. It is anti-social to create a scarcity value for the advantage of a few."

"How do you propose to vest the interest of robot workers in mass-production factories?" asked Mr. Slattery.

"At the present stage of development, I can see no opportunity for robot workers, as robot workers, though in their capacity as citizens, they might very well be very useful members of non-occupational groups."

"At the present moment you can't see," Mr. Slattery commented. "At a later moment, what do you foresee?"

"Do you want me to be forward-thinking, large-minded and Utopian?" I asked. Mr. Slattery nodded. "Then, I foresee the possibility that robot labour may be reduced to very small

proportions, and that mass-production may not be a whole-time job for anybody, but may be undertaken for a few weeks at a time, or for a short time in the day by people who have more rewarding tasks to perform."

Before Mr. Slattery could say anything in reply to this, I hastily gave out the third article of the Charter.

"It is desirable that all people should hold property. If that property is the basis of their work, so much the better, but property in any form is better than none. This is not a matter in which the State can do everything, but it can do a great deal. It can encourage the growth of permanent savings by tax exemptions, and it can encourage independent firms and independent individual craftsmen by a right use of its great purchasing power. The present tendency of the State is exactly the opposite; it is to buy from as few firms as possible, because that makes things easier for organisation and bookkeeping. But I fancy that the encouragement of the small man will be quite a popular cry."

"A sentimental cry," said Mr. Levi.

"Sentimental cries are what I am looking for," I said. "What accounts for the sickness of our community is the absence of sentimental cries and the presence of sentimental grumbles. You will never get anything but a passive and unconstructive response from the people unless you are able to appeal to their generosity and unselfish instincts."

"I believe you there," said Mr. Gudgeon.

"So do I, if you mean the common people," said Mr. Levi.

"I do mean the common people," I answered. "But I also mean the uncommon people. I mean, in fact, the people. I would also appeal to their pride and sense of national achievement. There are certain established principles of our social life which not many nations have managed to establish and to keep for any length of time. Some of these were indicated by Mr. Churchill when he visited Italy and gave advice to the Italian people. Freedom of opinion, and courts free from the coercion of the executive are two of the assets he gave for a worthy political system. I would put these rights of man in a short and simple table, and would tell the people that this is a historic achievement which must not be thrown away or betrayed."

"Who betrays it?" asked Mr. Gudgeon. "Are you referring to our crypto-Fascists?"

"I am referring to all who indulge in adulation of foreign systems which have destroyed these liberties," I said. "To excuse subservient courts and universal espionage on the count that the country which suffers these has got pithead baths in exchange is to lower respect among ourselves for the most valuable things we have. To say that these liberties are of minor importance for the Russians is to say, by inference, that they are of minor importance for ourselves—or that the Russians are not fit to be free. In the respect that these liberties are of the highest value, in that respect we are superior to the Russians, and that must be made clear in our bearing within and without the country. We need not boast about ourselves as the Russians do, but we must bear unyielding witness to the standards which we cherish. If we try to argue that though the Russians may not have our social article, they have something just as good, if not better, we are talking like an anxious shopkeeper, and we show that we are in the mood to sell. There is nothing which I am willing to take in exchange for the right to call my soul my own."

"Well," said Mr. Levi, laughing lightly. "If you think the Russians are going to listen to you telling them how superior we are to them, you are certainly an optimist."

"I don't think they will listen," I answered. "I know they will not be allowed to listen, because they do not enjoy our essential liberties. But the enormous mistake made by the Russian ruling class is to imagine that we ourselves do not feel superior in respect of liberty, when we do, and it is the fault of the sentimental grumblers that they are encouraged in this great error. I am not complaining of men 'running their country down,' for that may sometimes be a proper course, provided it is not prompted by silly affectation; but I am complaining of men who run down the value of the standards to which they make hysterical and indignant appeals when it suits. I am complaining of the Council of Civil Liberties. Such bodies ought to be unpopular."

"Are you opposed to civil liberties?" demanded Mr. Levi.

"I am not," I said, "but the Council is."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Levi pugnaciously. "Explain."

"With pleasure," I said, "though it's keeping me off my Charter. To begin with——"

"No," said Mrs. Beveridge. She put down her knitting and said "No" again, with great finality. "Don't begin. Stop. I don't really—want to hear any more about your Charter, and I want you to listen to me."

The good lady was slightly flushed and very much in earnest. We all sat back, feeling faintly embarrassed, as if we had been caught in rather frivolous talk on something very dear to one of the listeners.

"We'll listen with the greatest pleasure," said Mr. Gudgeon in his fruitiest voice. "We always want to hear the woman's point of view."

"That's what I object to," retorted Mrs. Beveridge with spirit.

"What?" asked Mr. Gudgeon.

"Everything," said Mrs. Beveridge. "Just everything."

## Chapter Eight

### SOLILOQUY

**M**RS. BEVERIDGE looked round us all with a glance of proud and angry fire.

"I mean everything," she repeated. "I know I'm not expressing myself very well, but I don't want to be interrupted, because, then, I'll express myself worse than ever. I've listened to your talk for weeks, and I want to ask you—when are you going to *say* something? I don't care which of you it is, but I want somebody to say something, not just talk."

"But Mrs. Beveridge," began Mr. Gudgeon protestingly.

"Don't interrupt," Mrs. Beveridge cried imperiously. "I want to tell you what *I* think, and it's very hard to explain. It's like this. You never talk about things or people; you just use words about words. Take education. You've argued about that, night after night, and I daresay you would all say you were deeply interested in education, and anxious to improve it. But not one of you has ever asked Willie how he was getting on with his lessons. Don't think I'm annoyed about that. There's

nothing bores me more than having my friends tell me about the prizes their children win at school, except them telling me how clever their babies are. It's quite natural that you shouldn't be very interested in Willie's lessons, but Willie's lessons are education. If you're not interested in them you're not interested in education. You're interested in something else. You're like the people who read the reviews of novels and the dramatic criticisms in the Sunday papers, but never think of reading the novels or going to see the plays. You're only amusing yourselves with something."

"Come now," protested Mr. Gudgeon. "You can hardly pretend that I'm not interested in real education."

"I won't come now," replied Mrs. Beveridge with spirit. "You may be interested in real education, because it's your job. But what you're talking about here isn't real education; it's the Problem of Education. That's the word I was looking for! You are all interested in Problems, but not in realities. There's the Problem of the Proletariat, and the Problem of India, and the Problem of Education, and the Domestic Servant Problem. You may say you are interested in real people, but you can't say these Problems are real. It won't wash."

"What won't it wash?" asked Mr. Levi.

"The dishes," Mrs. Beveridge answered. "Lucy has left." She sat for a moment in silent, sorrowful thought. "I always thought Lucy was a nice girl. The way she used the vacuum used to give me the jumps, and she was awfully forgetful when she did the shopping. But she was neat and clean, and a good worker, and quite a bright girl to talk to. Many a chat we had about you gentlemen in the kitchen. She was interested in you, and I thought she was interested in me. No doubt Mr. Levi would say she was one of the proletariat, but she told me a lot of things she would never tell Mr. Levi—because I'm a woman, and because we had the same job to do.

"Well, she went off yesterday, for her free day. I said, 'You'll be back at the usual time, Lucy,' and she said, 'Yes.' She didn't come back at all, but a brother came to-day for her box. She has left without notice. It's not the inconvenience I'm worried about, though that's bad enough, but the fact that she played this mean trick on me. The last word she said to me was a lie. How *could* she? I felt I had been living in a fool's paradise all

those months when Lucy and I were having quiet chats and cups of tea together.

"What can all your fine schemes do to help me? What's the sense of talking about the Domestic Servant Problem, when you ought to be talking about Lucy? No doubt the Law could make Lucy work her notice or pay compensation, but that wouldn't stop me from feeling I had been fooled. The Law can't make me want to have Lucy back. If she could look me in the face, I certainly couldn't look at her.

"There's no use in Mr. Levi starting to say that there are bad mistresses as well as bad maids, and that bad conditions in the past account for Lucy. Even if it was true, it wouldn't make Lucy any better, and I don't believe it. When I was a girl, we had a maid called Agnes. She got less in a month than Lucy got in a week, and she had twice the work, but she didn't walk out, in spite of the bad conditions. We couldn't have got rid of her, even if we had wanted to, and she was with us till she died. Mr. Levi would say she was exploited, and I daresay she was, but she was one of the family, and she was proud of her work. If social reform means changing women like Agnes into women like Lucy, it's not much to make a song about.

"That's what happens when you start talking about Problems and dealing with groups and classes instead of human beings. I don't know whose ideas will get on top in the end, and I don't much care, except that I hope it's not Mr. Levi's. I mean, if you had to call everybody 'Comrade,' you would just hate everybody, wouldn't you? But, apart from that, I don't care what Acts of Parliament you pass, you won't do any good, if you just deal with Problems.

"Look at Mr. Chatterjee. Why, when Mr. Chatterjee came here first, I was a little doubtful about having him. It wasn't personal at all, but I had heard a lot about the Indian Problem when I was a girl. My uncle was a major in the Indian Army, and he used to say, 'East is East and West is West.' He thought that explained why he always threw his boots at his Indian batman whenever he lost money at the races. I must say I thought it was a rather queer argument, but it must have had some effect, for I was inclined to think Mr. Chatterjee must be a Problem, all by himself.

"Well, he isn't. He's just Mr. Chatterjee. He is a human

being, not exactly like any other human being. We get on very well, but we wouldn't if he thought of me as a White Woman and I thought of him as the Indian Problem. I dare say there is an Indian Problem, but it doesn't really *matter*. After all, there is a physical resemblance between all Japanese, but the important thing about them is not the resemblance, but the differences. I mean, you can deal with the Japanese if you remember they're different, but not if you insist they're all the same.

"When you talk about the proletariat or the capitalists or the *intelligentsia*, you aren't talking about *people*. You are only talking about certain resemblances among people, who are quite different in other ways. Mr. Baldero is a business man, and I suppose you might call him a capitalist, but he reminds me much more of a plumber who used to do repairs here than he does of any other capitalist I've met. He looks very like him and he has the same manner and the same way of speaking. According to class, they are as far apart as a Red Indian and an Eskimo, but when I think of them together, I can't help wondering if they're distantly related. A proletarian is just a name, but a plumber is a person.

"If we always remembered that, we would realise that the important thing is to get people to behave well as persons. If Lucy was a nice person she wouldn't have been got at by her friends who probably told her that she belonged to a downtrodden class, and needn't be ashamed of leaving the employing class in the lurch. It wasn't the employing class she was leaving in the lurch. It was me. I hadn't trodden her down, and I don't see why I should be badly treated just because other employers had badly treated other maids.

"Sometimes people are divided according to their income, and sometimes according to their occupation, and sometimes according to their race. You can cut humanity into sections any way you like, just the same as a cake. But mankind isn't a cake, and these sections don't tell you anything worth while. Whenever you get people mixed up thoroughly together, you find that these divisions don't matter a lot. That's true even in Parliament when they're paid to keep in sections; but men find there are people on the other side much more like themselves than the people on their own side.

"I know this will all sound very childish to you gentlemen, but you all sound very childish to me. If political arguments are



going to give Lucy an excuse for behaving like a mean little thing, then they're worse than useless. When are people going to stop being good proletarians or capitalists or Indians or Socialists, and start being good people? That's all that matters. If we can get people to be honest and considerate and tolerant and kind, it won't matter whether you have the Beveridge Plan or not. We all want to behave decently and help each other as well as we can, don't we?"

She looked round with a confident and challenging air.

"Surely we do," said Mr. Chatterjee earnestly. "I'm quite sure all of us here would like to make the world a better place."

"I do, anyway," said Mr. Levi. "The whole aim of my political philosophy is to further the Brotherhood of Man."

"Don't say that," Mrs. Beveridge called sharply. "Man is just another of these things, like the proletariat. You mean you want people to be nice to each other, and help each other along."

"Well," said Mr. Levi, "I——"

"I knew you did," said Mrs. Beveridge heartily.

"I suppose everybody does," said Mr. Baldero awkwardly.

"At least, every decent person."

"Fundamental decency as between man and man is what I do my best to teach," said Mr. Gudgeon. He cocked an eye at me, half-friendly, half-challenging. I nodded. It was sad, but true. He did his best.

"Now, Mr. Slattery," said Mrs. Beveridge briskly and cheerfully. "Putting aside all the 'isms' and nonsense, you want people to behave well, and to be good *persons*, don't you?"

"You read me like a book," said Mr. Slattery gravely.

Mrs. Beveridge turned to me in high triumph.

"There you are," she declared. "You all want the same thing, and yet you sit here, night after night, wrangling, as if you wanted different things. Why don't you get together and agree? There's nothing to stop you, except a lot of big words that mean hardly anything at all. This argument is all quite unnecessary. We all have the same ideas. You must admit that, mustn't you?"

I put down my spectacles and looked severe.

"Madam," I said in a threatening voice, "do you *really* want me to start all over again?"

